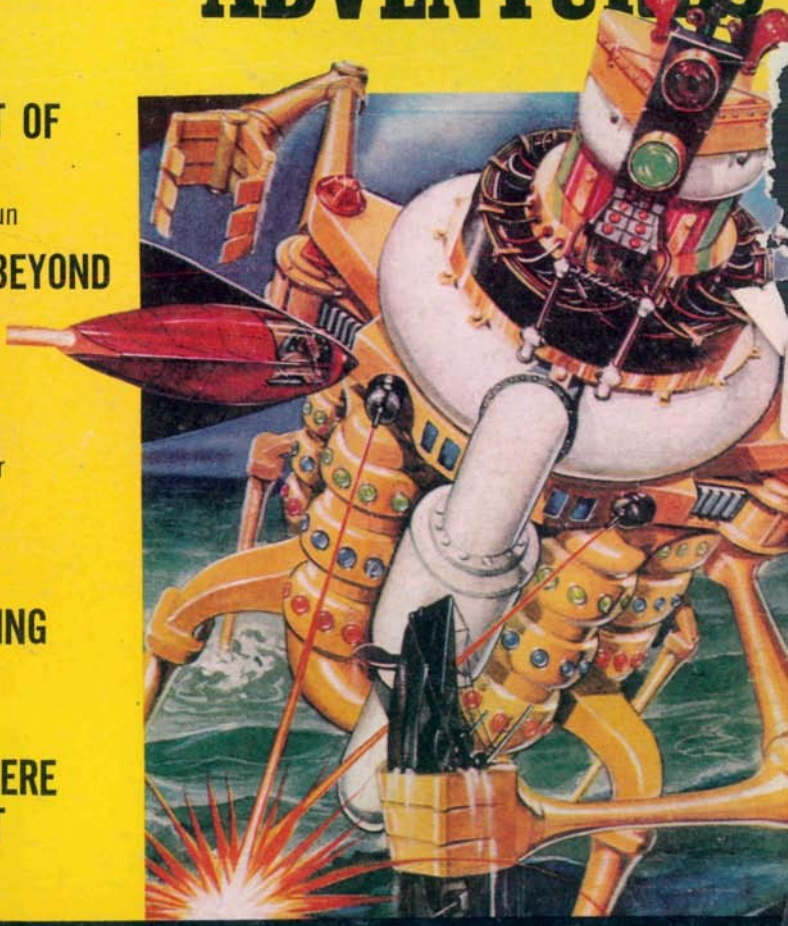
EXCITING STORIES IN STRANGE WORLDS

THRILLING SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES

BIG NEW COLLECTION

NO. 16 • SUMMER 1970 • ICD 50¢



TERROR OUT OF THE PAST
by Raymond Gallun

BROTHERS BEYOND THE VOID
by Paul Fairman

SANCTUARY
by Charles Recour

UNFORSEEN
by Roger Graham

THE DREAMING TREES
by John Jakes

HELL IS WHERE YOU FIND IT
by Gilbert Grant

The METAL MONSTER

by E. K. JARVIS

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FUTURE WAR TANK

By HENRY JULIAN

On our back cover this month we present the artist's conception of the war tank of tomorrow, as based upon scientific principles, and possible modern developments in mechanized armament and attack units

(Back cover painting by Stanley Ryter)

NOW that the new war has come, with great stress laid on the mechanized unit of warfare, it seems timely that we take a glance at the future science of the war tank.

With such fortifications as the Maginot Line, the Siegfried Line, and the old and dependable trenches, it seems likely that a new form of attack will be developed. Will this new attack be in the form of a monster moving fort that can burst its way through any fortification and then hold it until the arrival of its supporting infantry?

Let us consider what such a tank would be like. First, it would be a huge thing, but would be completely streamlined. There would be no protruding surfaces or angles to catch armor-piercing shells. It would present only curved surface that would deflect shells, or cause them to explode harmlessly outside. Its tractors also would be protected, and would not rely entirely upon themselves for locomotion, but on a giant roller which in itself could move the tank, but which would be most used to roll down obstructions and at the same time provide a roadway behind the tank to facilitate the advance of the following infantry.

The armor of this giant would be laminated and many inches thick.

For armament it would carry several heavy guns, but would depend mainly on heavy calibre rapid-firers and on machine guns. From their positions in this tank, a hundred men would enjoy almost impregnable positions with the added advantage of instant mobility.

Flame throwers would be a potent weapon against infantry, gun emplacements, machine-gun nests, etc. It would be virtually impossible for an attack by infantry to succeed in disabling this monster, as was done in the Spanish war; i.e. throwing bottles of gasoline into the tractors.

Gas attacks also could be repulsed. The tank could be made air-tight by closing all openings. Air-conditioning of the interior would eliminate chance gassing or suffocation.

Part of the crew would consist of a company of infantry, armed with machine-guns. They would take no part in the battle until the desired position was reached, when they could take over a captured enemy entrenchment and hold it to cover the advance of the main body of infantry, while the giant tank went on still further.

Let us envision an attack on a fortified enemy position by our future war tank. It is early dawn. The signal for the big push comes. This giant lumbers forward at a deceptively rapid speed. It is so huge it seems to move slowly. But in reality, it can cover the ground at speeds of forty and fifty miles per hour. It advances inexorably, crossing no-man's land, crushing down barbed wire entanglements, and finally reaches a fortified knoll where the enemy has successfully held out for a week by reason of a well entrenched machine-gun defense.

The machine guns don't help now, however. The oncoming juggernaut rolls right over them, smashing down concealments, driving gunners to flight. They don't get far, because a barrage of bullets overtakes them, and waves of intense flame engulf them.

A heavy gun emplacement looms up. It is ready and waiting, and it belches a heavy shell. It strikes high on the rounded front of the big tank, glances, and explodes with a shattering roar. Men at the guns in the tank are stunned by concussion, but they are replaced by others of the large crew instantly. The tank staggers a bit, but continues on, its powerful motors untouched. The big gun goes out of commission as the concrete crushes down upon it under the tremendous weight of the huge roller of the tank.

Behind the underground gun are walled fortifications which tumble before the onslaught of the giant. Soldiers flee in all directions. The defense has been broken. The giant tank halts, prepares to defend its newly captured position, while infantry squads rush from it to take up the vacated positions of the enemy.

In view now, in the dawn, are enemy emplacements which have been causing trouble in the previous week's advance. They are singled out by the tank's heavy guns and silenced. Through the breach in the enemy lines comes the infantry and the mechanized units of cavalry and artillery. Speedy smaller tanks pour into the sector. The enemy, its strongest point dominated by the big tank, is split, and their retreat becomes a rout.

The big tank has broken the back of the defense and its work is now finished. Even though destroyed by concentrated enemy fire, it has served its purpose.

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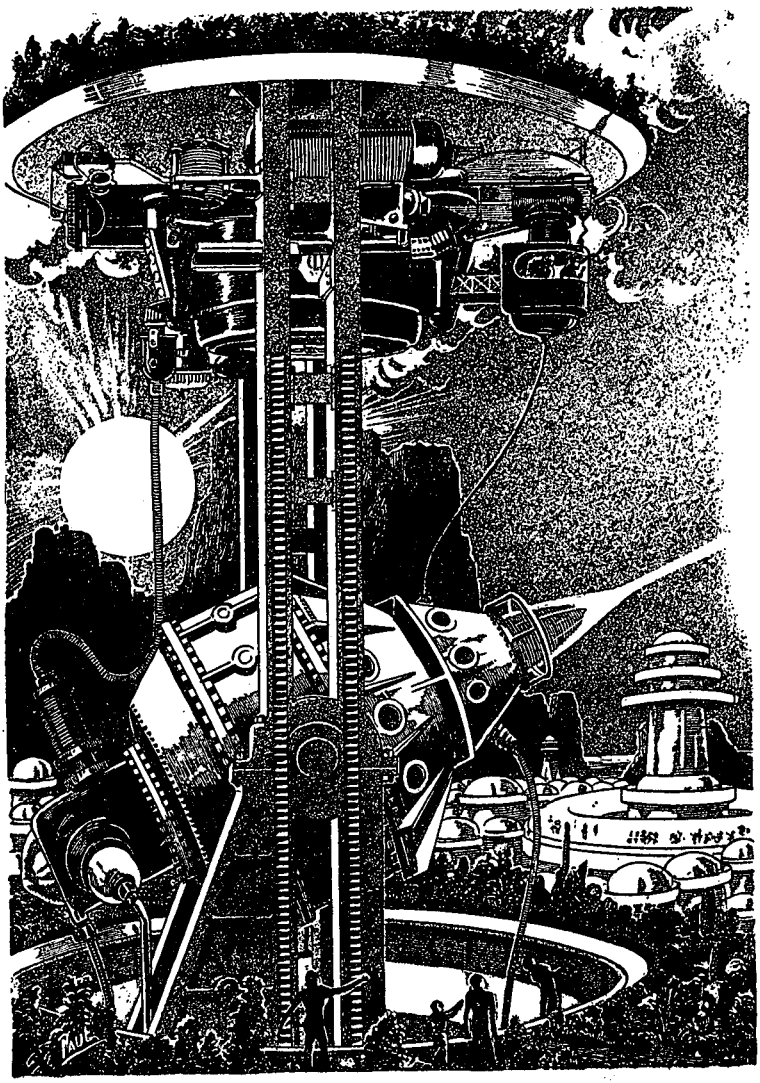
THE METAL



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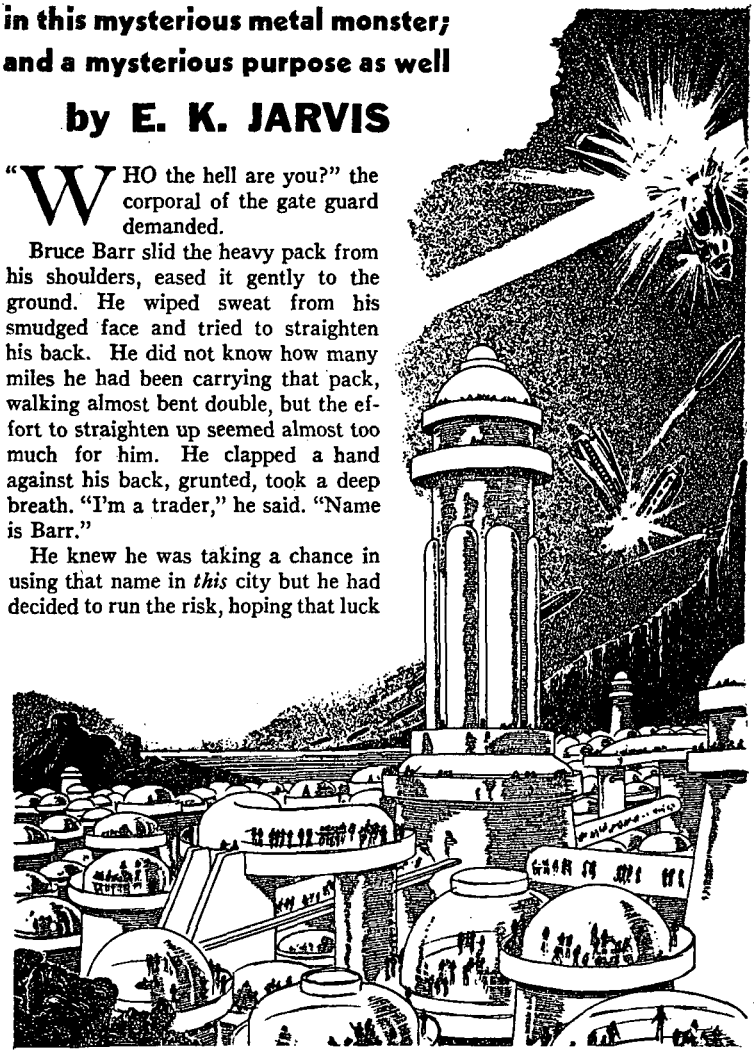
MONSTER...

There was death and destruction in this mysterious metal monster; and a mysterious purpose as well

by E. K. JARVIS



"WHO the hell are you?" the corporal of the gate guard demanded.

Bruce Barr slid the heavy pack from his shoulders, eased it gently to the ground. He wiped sweat from his smudged face and tried to straighten his back. He did not know how many miles he had been carrying that pack, walking almost bent double, but the effort to straighten up seemed almost too much for him. He clapped a hand against his back, grunted, took a deep breath. "I'm a trader," he said. "Name is Barr."

He knew he was taking a chance in using that name in *this* city but he had decided to run the risk, hoping that luck

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might favor the bold. No Joiner would ever suspect that the son of Old Barr would willingly put himself into their power. They would not grow suspicious because of the name. Or he was gambling that they would not. There were many Barrs.

The corporal of the gate guard studied his face. On the wall above him archers were lounging at ease, their bows unstrung. Like the corporal, they were watching him intently.

"A trader, huh?" the corporal said.

"Yes," Barr answered.

"What territory have you been covering?"

"North, around Albany, and down the west bank of the Hudson," Barr said promptly.

"Do you have your trading permit?"

"Certainly," Barr answered. He had *that*. Neither he, nor any other trader, would dare to come into New York without that all-essential permit, not unless he wanted to risk having his neck stretched at the end of a rope. Barr carefully pulled the permit out of an inner pocket, removed the waterproof wrappings, handed it to the corporal.

The guard examined it minutely, glancing up from time to time to make certain that Barr fitted the description.

"It seems to be in order," he said grudgingly, handing it back.

Barr said nothing. The permit had better be in order. Otherwise a lot of time had been wasted in making it a perfect forgery. Not to mention his neck! But, as he carefully wrapped the piece of stiff paper and restored it to his pocket, his face revealed nothing of the tremendous relief he felt inside. He had passed the first hurdle! His permit had been accepted as genuine!

That there would be other, unforeseen hurdles, he did not doubt. Well, he would have to meet them as they came. Getting into New York and getting out again, and remaining alive in the process, was a feat that took some doing; but when he had volunteered for the job, he had accepted the risk.

"Open your pack," the corporal said.

Barr complied. This, too, he had anticipated. He watched the corporal's eager look of anticipation turn into disgust as he examined the contents of the pack. The corporal had obviously hoped that he might find something of value, in which case he, as keeper of the gate, could extract a little private blackmail.

"What is this stuff?" he demanded, fingering a coarse grained, golden flour.

"Corn meal," Barr answered promptly.

"Corn meal?" the corporal echoed blankly.

"Sure. Don't you know what corn meal is? It's flour made out of corn instead of wheat."

"You mean it's food?" the corporal questioned doubtfully. There was new respect in his eyes as he looked at Barr. A trader who brought food to New York would be certain of his welcome.

Barr laughed. "Yes, it's food. And good food too."

"Where did it come from?"

"Up north," Barr said, vaguely waving his hand toward the Hudson. "I found two small mills, run by waterpower, still in operation back away from the river. Somehow they had managed to survive destruction. It is possible that a close search will reveal still other mills and if transportation and protection can be arranged, no doubt a small but regular supply of food can be obtained from this area. I brought only a sample with me, to show to the leaders. If they are interested, and if the Presences have no objection, no doubt a small but welcome supply of food may be provided during the coming winter—"

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BARR broke off. When he had mentioned the Presences, the corporal had snapped to attention, clicked his heels together, and saluted smartly. On the wall above, the bowmen had gone through the same operation. All around him men were snapping to attention and saluting. Barr was suddenly aware that the corporal of the guard was staring fixedly at him. He snapped to attention.

"Power to the Presence!" he intoned. It was the same phrase the others had used. He repeated it.

"A little slow on the uptake, weren't you, Trader?" the corporal said, hostility in his voice.

"I'm sorry, sir," Barr hastily answered.

"Being sorry doesn't help," the corporal snapped. "What explanation do you have?"

"It is that—" Barr fumbled. "Where I have been—well, recently I have not had to salute—" He stopped, horror-stricken. He had stuck his neck out a mile and unless he could talk fast, he was in a jam.

"Where you have been, the men did not salute?" the corporal echoed. "Trader, what kind of men have you been seeing? Answer me, Trader."

To admit association with men who did not salute when the name of the Presence was mentioned was the shortest cut to sudden death. At a signal from the corporal, the men on the wall hastily strung their bows. These men were Joiners, every one of them. Barr found a dozen arrows pointed at him. He found himself looking at an exceedingly suspicious corporal who would like nothing better than to discover a man who was not a Joiner.

"What I was trying to say," Barr said steadily, "was that I have gotten out of the habit of saluting—"

"You have!" This was heresy, meriting death.

"Will you let me finish?" Barr snapped. "It has been two weeks since I saw another human being. Unless I was in the habit of talking to myself, how could I speak of the Presences?"

This time he snapped promptly to attention, saluted, and intoned, "Power to the Presence." The corporal echoed him. The bowmen on the wall did not. The fact that they were on the alert with drawn bows excused them.

"Does that explanation satisfy you?" Barr demanded. He was acting angry now, as if he were outraged at the thought that anyone could even doubt his loyalty to the Joiners. In reality, he was bluffing. He would have liked to slit the throat of every Joiner in the world but it would not have been diplomatic to say so under the present circumstances.

The corporal hesitated. This man was big and bronzed and he looked competent. He was a trader, which meant he went into the wild outlands. Only a courageous man would do that. Moreover he looked tough. It might not be wise to make an issue of such a minor thing as forgetting, under unusual circumstances, to salute when the Presences were mentioned.

"Well," Barr demanded. "Don't stand there gawking. Remember, I'm bringing food samples to this city. Are you so well supplied that additional food does not interest you?"

The corporal was in a spot and he knew it. The remaining inhabitants of New York for years had been on the verge of starvation. Anyone who could bring food to the city was certain of a welcome. If the corporal had shot a man who was bringing even the promise of food, he would have to answer to his leaders. He hesitated.

Barr saw the hesitation and dared to breathe again. "Make up your mind"

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he said truculently.

"You can enter," the corporal said. Then, his little flouted authority as keeper of this gate, asserting itself, he flared. "You don't have to get so tough about it. Go on in. But first I'll have to inspect your arrowheads."

Barr's only obvious weapons were a short but heavy bow and a quiver of arrows. No Joiner, even if he could have managed to obtain them, was permitted to own a more powerful weapon than a bow and arrow. This regulation was handed down from the Presences themselves; it was designed to prevent the possibility of revolt by keeping effective weapons out of the hands of the people. Barr was familiar with the regulation. But never before had he heard of the guard at the gate inspecting the arrowheads.

"What's the purpose of this inspection?" he demanded.

"Never mind the purpose," the corporal grunted. "Just pour those arrows out of that quiver.

BARR hesitated. He could feel cold sweat popping out all over his body. He was in a desperate spot. He had passed the hurdle of the permit and he had bluffed his way out of the predicament resulting from his failure to salute when mentioning the name of the Presences but he had run straight into another hurdle. His arrowheads would never stand a close inspection. There were twelve arrows in his quiver. Four of them had perfectly normal steel heads. Eight of them had what looked like normal steel heads but which were in reality tiny but extremely powerful atomic bombs, designed to explode when the arrow struck. A casual inspection would not reveal their true nature but if the corporal examined them closely, he would instantly detect that something was wrong with them.

A man with atomic bombs hidden inside his arrow heads would have a short life and an unhappy one. The Presences themselves would be interested in this. They would see it, and see it rightly, as a threat to them. A man with atomic arrowheads would live just exactly long enough to shriek out his whole life history, under torture, and no longer.

"What am I going to do?" the thought flashed through Barr's mind. He might try to run. There was no protection at all outside the wall that closed off the city. Every tree had been cut down, every rock removed. The men on the wall still had their bows strung. Before he could take twenty steps, he would have a dozen arrows through his body. No, he couldn't run. Running was an invitation to death.

"Dump those arrows out," the corporal repeated.

"All right," Barr grumbled, loosening the leather strap that held the quiver on his back. "I still don't see why you want to inspect them."

"Anybody but an idiot would know that," the corporal answered.

"Well, I'm not exactly an idiot and I don't know it," Barr answered. "Would you mind telling me why or is it a state secret?"

"Anybody but a trader who spends all his life in the sticks would know the reason," the corporal said. "Metal."

"Metal?" Barr echoed.

"Certainly," the corporal said sarcastically. "Hadn't you heard that arrow heads are made of metal? And all metal must be turned in. Arrow heads, spear heads, axe heads, knives, everything that is made of metal. Order of the Presences themselves."

The corporal quickly saluted, intoned, "Power to the Presence," and Barr did likewise.

"Another drive for scrap?" Barr said.

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"I thought this country had been picked clean of metal long ago."

"Between you and me, I think so too," the corporal said, becoming more friendly. "But it is an order and I have to obey it."

"Naturally," Barr said. "But it leaves us in the devil of a spot. What are we going to use for arrow heads and knives if we have to turn in all metal?"

"I don't know," the corporal shugged. "Flint maybe."

"Flint arrow heads! Flint knives! The stone age is here all over again!" Barr mused grimly. He did not speak his thoughts aloud. They might be interpreted as criticism of the way the country was being run. The Presences did not tolerate criticism.

"Well, my arrows have steel heads," Barr said, pulling them out of the quiver. "What do you want me to do with them?"

"Just put them over there in that box," the corporal answered, pointing to a wooden receptacle that already contained a collection of similar bits of metal. Barr hesitated, then decided to comply. He hated to give up those arrow heads but he had no choice in the matter. Refusal would gain him nothing. Inwardly he was tremendously relieved that the arrow heads were not going to be subjected to a careful examination. He had been afraid that the gate guards had been tipped off to look for a man with tiny atomic bombs hidden inside the heads of his arrows. If that had been true, it would have meant that news of his coming had preceded him here, that someone on his side was a traitor. It wasn't true, to his great relief. He had merely run into another scrap metal campaign. Apparently the Presences were going over the country with a fine-tooth comb looking for all available metal. Well, let them look for it, Barr thought grimly. They would have a hell of a time finding it in usable quantities!

Working with extreme care, he removed the heads from the arrows and put the heads in the box. The arrows he thrust back into his quiver, grumbling as he did it. His grumbling was quite in character. A trader would be expected to grumble. He muttered bitterly when he was forced to relinquish a fine hunting knife but he got little sympathy from the corporal.

"Is it all right for me to enter the city?" he asked, slinging his pack on his back.

"Yes," the corporal answered, signing to the gateman.

The ponderous wooden gate swung open. Barr stepped through. His heart leaped as he stepped through the gate. He was in New York. He was inside the city. The first lap of his dangerous journey was successfully completed!

CHAPTER II

Tomorrow in New York

IT WAS the first time Barr had ever seen New York, although, from childhood on, he had heard tales of it. New York was the wonder city of the continent, and probably of the world, the glittering metropolis on the eastern seaboard, the city whose sky-flung towers awed all visitors. Barr had seen a few faded pictures of New York in the days of its glory. After the second world war had ended in 1944 and America had emerged as the dominant nation on earth, New York had been the Queen City of the World. It had been in its glory then. Now—

There was bitterness in Barr's heart as he stared at the scenes around him. He had passed through the gate and was walking down a street that led to the heart of the city. Once this street

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had been a magnificent avenue, lined solidly on both sides with apartment houses, wide enough for eight lanes of traffic.

It was wide enough now for a goat to pick its way down the middle. The avenue had shrunk to a footpath.

It had shrunk in size because the apartment houses on both sides had fallen into it, almost closing it with their rubble of brick and stone.

In effect, the apartment houses had jumped into the street. They had jumped into the street because bombs had landed somewhere near. Not big bombs, either, at least not big in size. They had not weighed over ten pounds. Their destructive effect had been out of all proportion to their size.

Barr picked his way down the street. Here and there among the ruins he could see rude shelters constructed of brick and stone. Windowless, with holes serving as doors, they looked like hovels. They *were* hovels. Now and then he saw wan faces peeping out of them. Once he saw a child, a thin, emaciated little girl, with the bulging stomach that is a sure sign of starvation. He averted his face.

Although he had seen other cities like this the sight still turned a knife in his heart. Chicago he had seen, and St Louis, and Pittsburgh. Michigan Avenue in Chicago looked even worse than this street. Chicago was a mound of shattered rubble beside peaceful Lake Michigan.

He did not know what London looked like, or Paris. No radio signals ever came from Europe to tell the tale of what had happened there. He wondered if there was an England. The English, that tough, stubborn people, had certainly not surrendered. They had fought. It was in their nature to fight. What had happened to them?

Barr trudged into the city. In places the street was unobstructed, the buildings on either side still standing though there was not a pane of glass in any window. The buildings were showing plentiful signs of decay. No effort had been made to maintain them. Downspouts, gutters, knobs from the doors, every scrap of metal had been ruthlessly torn out of them in some early salvage hunt. How the Presences must want metal! Well, Barr thought, they'll have a hell of a time getting it, even with all the Joiners in the world to help them!

Here, where the buildings had not been completely destroyed, more people were living. Existing would be the better word for it, since on every face he saw the sure marks of starvation. Here were even a few pitiful little shops, in one he saw the only commodity offered for sale was tow sacks, and from the clothing he occasionally saw around him, he knew what the sacks were being used for! When no cloth was being manufactured, people had to use what they could get for clothing. What little trade there was was strictly by barter. There was no money in existence. Paper money was worthless and gold and silver coins had long since been confiscated.

Barr knew exactly where he was going: Times Square. He did not know how to get there and he had to stop twice and ask directions. Each time the answer to his question was a jerk of the thumb. No one spoke to him but he caught occasional side-long glances as people stared curiously at him. He did not know whether it was his leather clothing that was attracting their attention or the pack on his back. He was dressed entirely in soft leather, even to the moccasins on his feet. He had the hunch that if these people knew there was food in his pack he would be mobbed.

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BEFORE he reached Times Square he saw ahead of him in the distance the ruins of what had been one of the sights of New York in the days of the New York's glory—the skyscrapers. Tall buildings climbing up one hundred, two hundred stories in the air. He gasped at the sight of them, marveling at the effort that had gone into building them, into the vision that planned them. Some of the skyscrapers were mounds of rubble but others were standing. Useless now. It was too much of a struggle to climb to the top of those tall towers. He knew that the buildings had once contained elevators, and might contain them still, but he also knew there was no power in the city to run the elevators. Or to run anything else. Except for the malicious life it contained, the city was dead. Dead and done for. Gone, finished, all washed up, the days of its glory ended.

Barr reached Times Square. Once in the long ago he knew thousands of people had thronged here. This had been the heart of the theatrical district and at night the glow of its lights had lit the sky with their brilliance. Unnumbered automobiles had once used these streets, and trains, the subway, had even run underground. The street creeping off through the debris was Broadway, the Great White Way in the days of America's glory. Broadway was no longer a Great White Way and there was no longer glory in America.

Barr found his rendezvous. Once a mighty building had stood here on this street. Now only the corner stone remained. Graved in the stone were the words ANNO DOMINI 2090. He thought, with a touch of nostalgic sadness, that the corner stone had been laid in the year he was born. Twenty-eight years the stone had stood here. Somehow it had managed to survive the horror that had strode on earth-shaking feet through this city. This corner stone was his place of rendezvous. Here someone—he did not know who—would meet him. He shrugged his pack to the ground, sat down beside the stone, and ran over in his mind the pass-words that would serve not only to identify him but to identify the unknown person who was to meet him here. To the casual passer-by, he was only a tired man who had chosen this spot to ease off his burden and rest for a while.

The passers were few. Mostly women, old women at that, and a few children. Almost no men. He wondered where the men were and decided they must be in labor squads. The Presences required labor from those who joined them, labor in large amounts. In exchange for the labor they offered the one thing that was almost impossible to resist—food.

"Hello, Stranger," a voice said near him.

Barr looked up quickly. He was startled, for two reasons. One, this was the code greeting by which he would know the person who was to meet him. The second reason was simply that he had not heard the person approach.

A slim slip of a girl was facing him. She had gray eyes, he noticed, and hair the color of dull copper. But what he noticed most of all was the fact that she was clad in the yellow uniform of the armed forces of the Joiners. The bars of a lieutenant were on her shoulders.

For a girl to be serving in the armed forces was not unusual. In the bitter struggle that was going on, women served beside the men, often with equal valor. But for a girl or anyone else in the uniform of a Joiner to be asking him the code question that would identify his friends within the city meant—

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Barr did not know what it meant. Trouble, most likely. Barr wondered whether he should give the proper answer to her greeting. To do so would serve to identify him. If she was a Joiner, and if the Joiners were aware of his purpose in coming here, it would identify him to his doom. He decided against giving the proper answer.

"Hi, Sis," he said.

The girl's face showed surprise, then anger. "Sir!" she said.

"Does your mother know you're out?" Barr asked. He was watching her closely.

She colored. "Keep a civil tongue in your head," she snapped.

"You started this conversation," he reminded her.

"What if I did? Can't I speak to a stranger without getting snapped at?"

Barr grinned. "No hard feelings, Sis." He eyed her appraisingly. "You're a pleasant-looking wench," he said.

ANGER made her really beautiful. No girl ever likes to be called a wench. This lieutenant especially did not like it. For a moment Barr thought she was going to explode. "You—you —" she was so mad she stuttered.

Barr could not quite make up his mind about her. She *looked* honest. He had a hunch that he could trust her. It was quite possible that she was wearing the uniform of a Joiner and was a member of the Joiner party but was actually working against them. When living among Joiners it was exceedingly unhealthy not to be one of them. She might be boring from within. He decided to test her. If she was a Joiner and if this was a trap— He looked around. No one else in the uniform of a Joiner was in sight. If this was a trap, he could slug her and run.

"Nice day, isn't it?" he said. This was strictly code.

She was still so angry she could not speak. At his words, she blinked and looked doubtfully at him. Seeing the look of surprise on her face, Barr instantly knew that she had recognized the code. She was no casual passerby who had happened to speak to him, then. She had come to this rendezvous looking for him. He waited for her answer.

"It's a nice day, if you happen to like it," she snapped.

This was the answer she was supposed to make.

"Okay," Barr said. "Where do we go from here?"

"Follow me," the girl answered. She turned and walked away.

Barr slipped his pack on his shoulders and turned to follow her. He still did not completely trust the situation. She might be leading him into a trap. Vehemently he wished he had a weapon of some kind, one of those old-time automatic pistols would be a big help. He hadn't brought a pistol for the reason that to be caught with it would insure his speedy death. Pistols were *verboten*—forbidden.

The girl led him into a cheap bar. There were a few men lounging here. They eyed him incuriously. The girl, with a jerk of her chin, led him through a door at the back. Barr, every sense alert, followed. "If this a trap, I'm in it," he thought.

He could not quite bring himself to believe it was a trap. This girl, despite the fact that she wore the yellow Joiner uniform, somehow looked honest. He followed her down a flight of stairs, along a narrow tunnel. They came to a heavy door. She gave a peculiar knock and the door opened.

There were five men in the room. Three of them wore yellow uniforms. They looked up at Barr and the girl entered.

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"Fellows," the girl said, "I've brought you the spy we were expecting."

There was silence in the room. Not a man spoke. The air was heavy and musty. Barr was aware that the men were staring at him. They were making no effort to hide the hostility in their gaze.

"Spy, did you say, Rita?" a bearded, dark-faced hulk of a man drawled.

"That's what I said, Bruton," the girl answered.

"A spy from the so-called Council of Scientists?" the bearded giant continued. He fairly spat out the words.

"That's right," the girl said.

Silence fell again. Five pairs of eyes were focused on Barr. The girl did not look at him. Then Bruton spoke. "Ah," he said.

"Ah, what?" a second man spoke.

"Ah, shall we shoot him, or ah, shall we knife him?" Bruton answered. As he spoke his hand went inside his yellow blouse and brought out a gun, something Barr had not expected to see here in this city.

"I say let's knife him," a third man spoke. "Powder and lead are too hard to get to waste on rats."

A growl of approval met this statement.

"Well, well," Barr said. "So it is a trap!" He looked at the girl but she avoided his gaze. "Good going, Sis," he said harshly. "No doubt your masters will reward you generously for this."

"Shut up!" the man she had called Bruton spoke.

Barr was silent. He was looking quickly around the room, darting glances out of the corners of his eyes, estimating his chances of coming out of this place alive, if any. Five against one, not counting the girl. The five were armed and he was not. The odds were bad. His only hope was to jerk open the door and run, which was no hope at all. He wasted no time and no mental effort in cursing himself for falling into this trap. The girl had fooled him. Somehow the Joiners had managed to intercept the radio messages that announced his coming and had cracked the code in which the messages were written. They had been waiting for him, with the proper pass words all ready.

"We always give a man a chance to speak for himself," Bruton said. "Even a spy. If you have anything to say, say it." He was holding the gun very steady.

"I've got something to say," Barr said. He forced himself to be calm, forced steadiness into his voice. "Yes, I'm a spy. I was sent here by the Council of Scientists. I have a message for every man and woman in this city. The message is — those beasts that you call the Presences will soon be utterly destroyed and the human race will again take its rightful place as the rulers of earth!"

SPOKEN in New York, these words were heresy and Barr knew it. When he had admitted he was a spy, he had already signed his death warrant and nothing he could say would make his death more certain. He was hoping, by challenging them, to anger these Joiners. Angry men may fight well but they do not fight with their heads. If he could make them mad, they might give him an opening for a break. An opening was all he asked.

Anger showed on their faces when he spoke.

"You're a fool!" Bruton said.

"More than that, you're a dangerous fool," a second man added. "If the words you have just spoken were generally known in this city, there would

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be an uprising."

"No doubt," Barr said. "And if you yellow Joiners had not aided the Presences by joining them, we would have licked them in the first place."

He gouged them in a raw spot that time. The Joiners had received their name because they advocated joining the Presences. All of them showed anger, including the girl lieutenant who had lured him here.

"And if you had the guts to fight now, we would still lick them!" Barr continued. "But I guess I can't expect a bunch of yellow rats to stand up and fight—" *Crash!*

Barr scooped a chair from the floor, flung it in a single motion straight at Bruton, who was lunging to his feet. The spy had the satisfaction of seeing Bruton go to the floor when the chair hit him. He was too surprised to use the gun he was holding. Bruton was down but he wasn't out.

"Get him!" he yelled at the top of his lungs.

The other four men leaped straight at him.

Barr took one step backward, grabbed the door handle and jerked with all his might. Throwing the chair had gained him a moment's respite. Before the Joiners could recover from their surprise he would be out the door and gone. This was one trap he had escaped.

The knob turned in his hands. The door would not open. Unnoticed, Rita had locked it when they entered.

"Damn!" Barr said.

He whirled, his fists coming up. He had the confused impression that the space in front of him was full of men, all of them trying to get at him. He struck out, his fist meeting solid flesh. A man grunted. Then they were on him.

Bruce Barr's muscles were all wire and steel springs. Ever since he had been old enough to walk, he had been rigorously trained. No athlete was ever better conditioned than he was. Experts had made him into a fighting machine. He fought now. Four against one, but he fought anyhow. Then Bruton lunged to his feet and it was five against one. A fist struck him under the jaw. He shrugged off the effect. He hit solidly at one of the faces in front of him. The face jerked backward. Somebody lunged in under his guard, dived at his legs.

If he could have stayed on his feet, he might have had a chance even if the odds were five to one against him. But he couldn't stay on his feet, not when they were jerked out from under him. He went down with a crash, tried to struggle erect, tried to keep on fighting. Something hit him on the head. Stars exploded before his eyes. Darkness closed in around the stars.

Bruce Barr lost consciousness. In the dazed second before the lights went out, he realized the Joiners had him.

CHAPTER III

The Joiner's Test

BARR'S first impression, when he regained consciousness, was that he was drowning. His second impression was a vague, wondering thought as to *why* he was regaining consciousness at all. Joiners usually didn't bother to revive their victims, unless, of course, they wished to extract information from them. He choked, swallowed, opened his eyes, and looked up into the perturbed gray eyes of Rita. She was dribbling water over his face. He sat up and looked into the faces of the five men who had been present in the room. Four of the men looked relieved when he regained consciousness. Bruton, he

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thought, looked annoyed.

He felt tenderly of his head. It was still attached to his body. From the way it felt, this was more than he expected.

"Well," he said. "What are you waiting on? Get on with your job and get it over with."

"Are you hurt?" Rita asked anxiously.

He stared bitterly at her. "Oh, no. Being beaten up and knocked out is my idea of an interesting fifteen minutes. Isn't it yours, too?"

She bit her lips. "I'm sorry you were so mistreated, but you haven't been badly hurt. Besides there was no other way of making certain about you."

He stared at her. "What the hell are you talking about?" he demanded.

"This," the girl answered. "We can't afford to take chances. We can't afford to make mistakes. You were waiting at the proper place and you knew the proper identification phrases. But the Joiners might have intercepted our radio messages, and they might have sent a spy to catch us all. So we put you to the test. In order to make certain of you, we pretended we were Joiners and led you to believe you had been betrayed. We did this so we could watch your reaction. If you had been a Joiner spy instead of a man sent by the Council of Scientists, we would have caught you. Our uniforms, the fact that we accused you of being a spy from the Science Council, would have fooled you into betraying yourself—"

Barr stared at her in stupified astonishment. His head was going round and round and nothing that he heard made sense. "What kind of damned foolishness is this?" he grunted. "What are you after now?"

"We're not after anything," the girl insisted. "Believe me when I say we are your true friends, we are the group you were supposed to contact."

"What—" In spite of himself, his mouth fell open. "That—that business of accusing me—"

"Was a test," the girl said eagerly. "You didn't know it was a test, but you passed it with flying colors. When you defied us, told us to go to hell, and tried to fight your way out of here, you did exactly the right thing. If you had done anything else, you would never have got out of here alive."

"Well, I'll be damned!" was all Barr could say.

His first impression of this girl was that she was honest. Involuntarily his eyes went to the yellow uniform she was wearing.

"Don't worry about this uniform," she said, interpreting his glance. "We belong to the Joiner party and we pretend to be Joiners. That is the only way we can stay alive. But we are really working for the Council, boring from within, fighting the Presences in the only way they can be fought."

Barr looked around the room. The others were nodding emphatic agreement with what the girl had said. He began to grin. "All I can say," he said, "is that if you treat your friends as rough as you have treated me, you must be holy terrors to your enemies."

He got slowly to his feet. Someone brought a chair for him, brought him, of all things, a cigarette. Eagerly they clustered around him, to hear what news he brought.

"What of the Council?" Rita eagerly asked. "How soon will they be able to give us help?"

"Yes," Bruton seconded. "How soon will they be able to give us ships and men? Or are they still doing nothing but stalling? When are we going to get some action out of those fellows?"

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BARR looked around the group. He saw the eagerness on their faces, the hope that the fierce struggle might soon be ended. He started to speak, swallowed, changed his mind. He could not bring himself to reveal to these people that the Council was little more than a name, that while it went by the awe-inspiring title of Council of the Scientists and while it was supposed to have a secret, invulnerable stronghold hidden away in the Rocky Mountains of the west, where it was constructing a vast quantity of powerful weapons, in reality it did not number more than five hundred men, and that its supposed stronghold was a crippled, half-equipped laboratory hidden in a cave. True, the men who worked in that laboratory were making a few weapons—they had made the tiny atomic bombs that had been fitted into his arrow heads—but those few weapons were made at the cost of back-breaking toil, and were not sufficient in quantity to equip a single regiment—if a regiment could have been raised. Barr simply did not choose to tell the truth. Men fought better when they had some hope of winning.

"We have ships!" he said firmly. "Rocket fliers."

"You do!" Rita gasped. "Oh, that is simply wonderful!"

"How do you suppose I got from the Rocky Mountains to New York without a ship?" Barr said.

"Where is your ship now?" Bruton questioned.

"Well hidden, outside the city," Barr grimly answered.

"How many of them do you have?" the bearded giant continued.

"I don't know," Barr answered. "Not as many as we will have six months from now."

There were exactly three rocket fliers in existence, one-man jobs but exceedingly fast and well-armed. Each one represented months of the hardest imaginable work—no, slavery would be the better term—by the few scientists and technicians who had managed to survive. Three ships to reconquer a world!

"Rocket ships!" Rita said exultantly. "Oh, if we can only use them in time—" Her voice faded. The exultation went out of it, was replaced by a dreary hopelessness.

Barr caught the change of tone. At the same time the others exchanged glances. Their actions sent a chill of warning through him.

"In time for what?" he said.

The girl avoided his eyes. She looked at the others. They shifted uneasily. No one spoke.

"Speak up," Barr said. "In time for what?"

Rita found her voice. "That's just it," she said. "We don't know what. All we know is that the Presences have some new scheme in mind. They're working day and night on it. They've commandeered all available labor, conscripted men, women, and children, all except the guard they have left in the city, and taken them down the coast. No one that has been taken has ever returned and we have been unable to discover what they are doing. They've established a huge armed camp, with a ring of guards around it. No one has been able to get close to the place, not even the Joiners. All we know is that they are building something, but we don't know what it is."

She spoke rapidly, like a person telling bad news. Her voice went into silence. There had been hope on her face when he told them of the rocket ships. Now the hope was gone. A dull resignation had replaced it.

"Isn't there any way to find out what they're doing?" Barr asked.

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"We've tried everything," Bruton spoke. "Harder, here," he nodded to one of the men who was not in uniform, "is a radio expert. He built a radio transmitter no bigger than a watch. One of the conscripts took it with him when he had to report for work. We thought he would be able to send out radio messages."

"He couldn't?" Barr questioned.

"The Presences found his radio before he had a chance to send a message. He got out three words. 'I'm done for.' That was all." The bearded giant shook his head. He did not need to explain what had happened to the man who had been caught with a radio transmitter in his possession.

"You have no idea what they are doing?" Barr questioned.

"None whatsoever," Bruton answered. He looked questioningly at Barr. "There is one way we *might* find out," he said.

"What's that?"

"You take your rocket ship and cruise over the area at night—"

"Not a chance," Barr interrupted.

"Why not?" Bruton challenged. "If you're afraid to go, I'll fly the ship, if you will tell me where it's hidden."

THE tone of his voice was an insult in itself. Barr stiffened, then stifled the angry retort on his lips. "Rocket ships are too precious to risk," he explained. "If I cruise over that area and run into a ray beam, I'll get myself killed. This is not important. The important thing is that the flier would be smashed. Under the circumstances, I don't dare risk losing the ship."

"You risked it when you flew it here," Bruton pointed out.

"I did not," Barr protested. "I flew only at night and I stayed away from populated places." He hesitated. He did not wish to seem uncooperative, but there were simply too few rocket ships in existence to risk losing one except in the most desperate emergency. He was annoyed at this challenge to his courage, but he kept himself under control. "If we cannot get the information we need in any other way, I'll use the ship. But first we will have to try every other method. Does that suit you?"

It obviously did not suit Bruton. For a moment the giant looked as if he wanted to spring at Barr's throat. The secret agent wondered why the man should be so insistent that they use the ship.

"Barr is right," another voice spoke. The agent looked around. A fellow by the name of Burke had spoken. Clad in the yellow Joiner uniform, he was the oldest man in the room. But in spite of the gray showing at his temples, there was a wiry alertness about him that Barr found to his liking. The agent instinctively judged that Burke was a man to tie to. "I once flew a crate myself," Burke said diffidently, as if he hated to mention his own exploits. "That was while we still had crates to fly. I agree with Barr that a rocket flier is too precious to risk. Anyhow, to take a flier over an armed camp of those gorillas that call themselves Presences is not a risk—it's suicide."

Burke spoke firmly. He talked like a man who knew what he was saying. "I've fought those devils before," he said. "A ship doesn't have a chance in the air above 'em. They have ray beams that are aimed and fired automatically. They will knock anything out of the sky up to fifty thousand feet and above that they are more likely to hit than they are to miss. It's no use going over at night, either, for their sighting devices operate by infra-red light. Darkness or daylight it makes no difference to them. If we want to

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find out what their new scheme is, we've got to figure out something entirely different."

The others nodded slow agreement, to Bruton's evident annoyance, who still insisted that they use the rocket flier. He was overruled.

"How important is it to know what the Presences are doing?" Barr questioned. "Is it worth risking our lives to find out their plans?"

"It is of the greatest importance," Rita said vehemently. "From their preparations, there is no doubt that they are making one last final effort to conquer this continent, to end the stalemate that has existed for the past nine years. If they succeed—well—if they win this time—I don't need to try to tell you what that will mean."

Barr nodded grimly. Too well he knew how little of the will to resist remained alive in America. If the Presences succeeded in gaining the upper hand just once more, they would stamp out all opposition so effectively that never again would a human being dare to resist them.

"We will discover what they are doing and stop it!" he said. In other circumstances, the words would have sounded like foolish bravado, like the boasting of a braggart who has never smelled the smoke of battle telling what he will do when the fight comes. But there was a grimness in Barr's voice which showed he was not boasting. He knew how great were the odds against them if they approached a place the Presences had declared *verboten*. The odds were a hundred to one they would not succeed—but it was a risk that had to be taken. If they died in the attempt—well, they would join the unnumbered millions who had already died fighting those incredible monstrosities who called themselves Presences.

CHAPTER IV

The Monster from the Sea

"IF YOU want to see it," the old man said, "you just sit here and watch. It will be along pretty soon. It hasn't missed a night in the last two weeks."

Barr was crouched at the edge of a sand dune, looking out over the sea. Rita was beside him. Four days had passed since they left New York. During this time they had worked their way carefully down the coast. Directly to the south of them, less than a mile away, lay the edge of the forbidden zone.

Rita had brought them to a tiny fishing village, a collection of rude huts, where she was known. Bruton, Harder, and Burke were back in the village now. The guide who had brought them to the edge of the ocean had once been the mayor of the fishing village, in the days when it was a prosperous little summer resort. Now he was a shaking gray-beard, haggard with superstitious fears. He crouched in the sand, stared out across the somber darkness that was the Atlantic.

"It'll be comin' pretty soon now," he muttered.

"Don't you have any idea what it is?" Barr questioned.

"Not the least idea, mister."

"But you've seen it," Barr protested. "What does it look like?"

"It don't look like anything I ever saw before," the old man answered. "It comes out of the sea, flashin' lights and screamin'. It heads right straight into the forbidden zone, but what it is I don't pretend to know."

"It must be a boat," Barr said. He wondered where the Presences had gotten a boat. All ocean-going vessels had long since been smashed or sunk, but perhaps they had found one somewhere

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and had managed to patch it up."

"It ain't no boat, mister," the old man said vigorously. "It don't float on the surface. It *wades* out of the sea."

"Wades!" Barr gasped. "You must be mistaken. How could it wade out of the sea? The ocean is half a mile deep not far out there."

"I don't know how it does it, I only know it does!" was the vigorous answer.

"Sh!" Rita spoke. "There's something coming now." In the darkness, Barr sensed rather than saw her upflung arm pointing out to sea. He crouched motionless on the sand, watching.

The ocean was dark. There was no moon. Except for the whispering of the waves on the beach, there was no sound. The dark, brooding sea and the too-still night gave the agent an impression of weirdness. A cold chill passed up his spine.

Far out on the dark expanse of waters, a tiny light flashed. It flickered once, went out. Once, in the long ago, lighthouse beacons had flickered like this along these shores, but this was no beacon from a lighthouse.

They waited. Their guide was mumbling to himself in what sounded like a prayer. Barr saw that the old man was kneeling. He touched the girl.

"Sh," she whispered. "His wife and two children were killed when his town was destroyed. He has never recovered from the shock."

"Poor fellow," Barr said sympathetically. He felt sorry for the man, yet he knew that this was only one case among millions of similar cases.

The light at sea winked on again. It was closer now. It blinked out. Across the surface of the waters came a low moaning sound. It died into silence and an echo ran along the shore.

"Here it comes!" the old man whispered. "Here it comes. Watch it close, mister."

SOMETHING came slowly out of the sea. It was a mile away and in the darkness Barr could not see what it was. He strained his eyes, cursing futilely at the weak star light. All he could tell was that something monstrously huge was walking out of the ocean. He caught vague glimpses of a huge bulk moving ponderously ashore. There was no question but that it was wading out of the water.

It went directly into the forbidden area.

"It's a god!" the old man croaked. "The Presences are gods! They've made another god to help them. Power to the Presence!" he hastily added as he remembered the phrase that must always be used when the name of the Presences were mentioned.

"Power to the Presence!" Rita quickly echoed.

"What—" Barr said.

"Say it!" the girl said fiercely.

"Power to the Presence!" Barr said. He looked at the girl.

"When we are with others, we must always use the phrase they have commanded," she explained. "When we are alone, it is not necessary. Now, what was that thing?"

"I have no idea," Barr answered.

"It's a god," their guide spoke again. "They're gods. It's helping them."

"They aren't gods!" Barr snapped.

"Then what are they?" the old man quickly asked. There was a wild, panicky note in his voice. He was on the verge of hysteria. Barr decided to humor him. Otherwise the old man might go mad.

"We don't know too much about

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them," Barr said. "But we do know that in their own language they call themselves Uighurs.* We know that they came from one of the most desolate regions on earth, the hinterland back of Tibet. There, in a series of valleys shut off from the rest of the world by high mountain ranges, they must have existed for centuries. The rest of the world did not even guess that they existed. There must have been millions of them in these valleys. How many there were we do not know. But we do know that they were infinitely farther advanced in science than we were. They had weapons that killed in the flash of a beam of light, they had bombs no bigger than hand grenades that would destroy whole city blocks, and—worst of all for these were the hardest to fight—they had flying battleships, gigantic fortresses armored with inches of the hardest steel, weighing thousands of tons—"

His voice faded into silence. He could not bring himself to describe the way the Uighurs had come out of their remote fastness, swarming over the world. They had come in the year that he was born, and he remembered nothing of it, but he had been told what had happened then—the world stunned by a sudden threat of capitulation or destruction. Hitler in the old days had never threatened more violently or had backed up his threats with more furious destruction. The Uighurs had power, they had power to burn, power to throw away. From fifty thousand feet they could drop a rain of bombs, tiny little bombs, that fell by the hundreds on a city. Bingo! There was no more city. They possessed at least fifty flying battleships, and so many cruisers and lighter craft that no successful count had ever been made of them. They did not hesitate to state their intentions: they were out to conquer the world.

The world simply did not believe them. It was impossible for any such small minority—and compared to the two billion population of earth, the Uighurs were certainly a minority—to rule a planet. No doubt the peoples of the Thirteenth Century felt the same way about Genghis Khan. That wild

*Uighurs—The real origin of the Uighurs remains one of the unsolved mysteries of science. There are three theories on the subject, the first, that the Uighurs were descendants of the Dune Dwellers, that lost race which flourished some 20,000 years ago in what is now the Desert of Gobi, leaving behind them thousands of artifacts, stone weapons, beads, etc., which are only now coming to light. This theory holds that the Dune Dwellers, who mysteriously vanished from Gobi, found refuge in hidden Himalayan valleys, and remained lost to the world for centuries, during which time they developed their science to dizzy heights. The second theory stems out of the first. It accepts the Dune Dwellers or some other primitive race as the ancestors of the Uighurs, but presents the interesting idea that these hidden people underwent an evolutionary mutation which greatly increased their brain power, the increased mental ability in turn enabling the Uighurs tremendously to develop their scientific knowledge. Whether or not such a mutation took place is not known, but it is known that the Uighurs, to put it mildly, were an exceedingly intelligent people. There is no questioning their mechanical genius. On the other hand, they were hopelessly under-developed in their ideas of government. They still retained a despot as supreme ruler, they had no knowledge whatsoever of the democratic process, for a long time they apparently did not know there were other races on earth, and when they discovered the existence of other peoples, they did not, and apparently could not, consider the problem of living in peace with their newly discovered neighbors but only how to conquer them. They could only conceive of themselves as masters, the rest of the world as slaves.

The third theory of the origin of the Uighurs holds that they were not earth-born at all but were a race from some other planet or some other star system, that this race had landed on earth at some remote time in the past, and had remained in hiding, developing their strength against the time when they would be strong enough to master the planet. The supporters of this theory offer in evidence the fact that the Uighur airships possessed some method of nullifying the effect of gravity and were capable of inter-planetary and quite possibly of inter-stellar flight.

Which theory is true is not known.—Ed.

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barbarian rode with his legions from an area to the north of the place of origin of the Uighurs and at the most, his fighting men did not number more than a few hundred thousands, no great force. Yet that force was disciplined as no other army in the past had ever been disciplined and it had new tactics and new methods of fighting. A few hundred thousand men could not conquer the world, yet the time came when the Golden Horde of Genghis Khan was known and terribly feared from the borders of Korea to the plains of Poland. In that sweep of thousands of miles of country—the then known world—Genghis Khan was master.

In the Twenty-First Century, eight hundred years later, the Uighurs came. Like the Horde of Genghis Khan, they came with new weapons, new methods of fighting, and a new discipline. They struck at a world that had known complete peace for one hundred and fifty years, at a world that, since the downfall of the last posturing little conqueror, Hitler, had known nothing of war.

THE peace of one hundred and fifty years had one terrible consequence —men had forgotten how to fight. More, they had forgotten the will to fight. They were sick of war, they wanted none of it. They had beaten their swords into plowshares. Now, when they needed swords again, they discovered they had to fight with plows, because they did not know how to beat them back into swords. They couldn't fight.

They tried. They came of warrior races and though they might have forgotten the arts of war, they had not forgotten anger. In their terrible anger they tried to fight. They took their huge stratosphere transport planes, designed to carry cargoes anywhere on earth, and armed them. Out of ancient armories they dug forgotten anti-aircraft guns, pointed them at the sky. They set their factories humming, building new weapons. Their laboratories went to work, designing new guns. Men, millions of them, began drilling in the old orders, forming armies.*

The only thing wrong with armies was that they were no good. The Uighurs had no armies. They fought from the sky. They could pass miles above an army, dropping a rain of ten pound bombs. In the area where those bombs fell, life ceased to exist. The armies were disbanded. They were broken into small groups. The small groups survived. Even the Uighurs could not bomb *all* the surface of the earth.

They could, and did, bomb cities. They could bomb industrial areas. They could blow up power plants, smash ship yards, ruin factories, but they could not strafe every hole in the ground, every ditch, every hillside. The human race, whom they had regarded as fit only for a vast slave population, fought back at them.

Huge stratosphere transport planes, crammed with hundreds of tons of explosives, were made into flying projectiles, ramming the vast air liners of the Uighurs. The planes were flown by robot pilots, operated by remote control. When they could sneak up on an Uighur

* A complete account of the war between the Uighurs and the rest of earth would require volumes. It was fought on a dozen fronts and in thousands of separate engagements. There was no question but that the ships of the Uighurs were stronger than any ship that could be brought against them. Strength was on their side. But numbers were on the side of the other races. The Uighurs slaughtered millions; other millions rose against them. The war developed into a grim battle of attrition, with the Uighurs destroying cities, factories, power plants, transportation systems. Then hunger and disease fought on their side. Hunger and plague killed more people than they ever did, but after a man is dead it does not matter whether he died of hunger or in a bomb blast—he is no longer a fighter.—Ed.

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battleship and ram it, that ship would cease to exist except as a rain of metal fragments plunging to the earth.

The trouble was—the Uighur ships were wary. It was not easy to sneak up on them. And they possessed weapons that would knock down a lumbering transport before it had a chance to reach them. Also, due to the destruction of factories, the transport planes were increasingly hard to build. For five years the battle continued. The Uighurs were winning slowly but surely.

But they were not winning fast enough to suit them. Consequently they took a leaf out of the history of the past. From all over the earth, they collected thousands of prisoners, removed them to their Tibetan citadel, showed them the might of the Uighurs, treated them well, gave them a stiff course in propaganda, and returned them to the places where they had got them—as fifth columnists who advocated collaboration with the Uighurs. They could not have struck a more cunning blow. Millions of bewildered people, sick of the unequal struggle, were taken in by this propaganda line. Thus the Joiners were born. They believed in joining the Uighurs.

If they could have proceeded uninterrupted for a few years, the Uighurs would have won a complete victory by this means. But they were not allowed to proceed without interruptions. The Council of Scientists had been formed. This council, which comprized the keenest minds on earth, succeeded in discovering the secret of the powerful bombs the Uighurs used. Then it devised a plan. Every plane that could take the air was quietly assembled in Tibet. Robot pilots were installed. The planes were loaded to the gills with atomic bombs, and one dark night, the whole mighty fleet was launched at the citadel of Uighur power, the workshops and the cities hidden in the Tibetan fastnesses. Thousands of tons of atomic bombs went off at the same instant.

THE explosion was heard all over earth. It blew a hole in the ground two miles deep. It blasted a mountain range out of existence. Within an area of fifty miles, no life remained. Its jarring action was so widespread that it set off earthquakes in California. Volcanoes came to life in Alaska and in Japan.

The citadel of the Uighurs, their laboratories, their factories and their workshops, went out of existence in one cataclysmic explosion.

This one act should have brought victory. It didn't. Uighur ships were scattered all over the earth. These embarked on a program of revenge. When they had finished dropping their bombs, no large city on earth remained untouched. No factories remained, no mines, no steel plants.

The result was stalemate. The Council did not possess the means to build new weapons. The Uighurs did not possess the means to build new ships. And, as the years passed, one by one the ships of the Uighurs were forced out of the skies, by the impossibility of effecting repairs. Too late they learned that their revenge, by destroying mines and steel foundries, had removed the sources of the metal they needed to repair their battleships of the sky. If they could secure metal they would be able to repair their ships and would unquestionably become the dominant race on earth. If they could break the stalemate, there would be no stopping them a second time.

"But they aren't gods," Bruce Barr said. "If you had called them devils, I would have agreed with you."

The old man refused to be reassured. He had seen too many instances of the

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power of the Presences, as the Uighurs insisted all Joiners call them. His attitude was precisely the viewpoint the Uighurs tried to force their followers to accept. Men who thought the Uighurs were gods would not fight against them. Fighting gods was useless.

"You take him back to the village," Barr said to the girl.

"All right," she answered. "But what are you going to do?"

"I'm going over there," he said. He swung his arm in an arc that indicated the forbidden area.

"You're going into *that?*"

"Sure."

"But you don't have a chance. They'll catch you. They're certain to discover you. They'll kill you—" There was a frantic note in her voice. It faded abruptly into silence.

"I've got to know what that sea thing is," he said. He turned, started to walk down toward the shore.

"Wait, I'll go with you," she said.

"You—" For a moment the preposterousness of her suggestion left him speechless. She wanted to go with him! It was impossible. But there was also something about it that was heartwarming. "Sorry, Rita," he said. "One person has a chance. Two people double the danger. It's nice of you to want to go but—"

He turned, walked away into the darkness. She made no attempt to follow him. The last glimpse he had of her she was staring after him.

A few minutes later, he approached the border of the forbidden area.

CHAPTER V

In the Uighur Camp

AHEAD of him, Barr could see the barricade, stakes driven into the ground, their sharp points leaning outward. A ring of searchlights illumined it. Behind the barricade, so arranged that their fire could sweep every foot of it, were the small, portable ray projectors of the Uighurs. He could see Uighur guardsmen on duty there. The Presences were guarding this barricade with their own men, which showed how important they considered the work they were doing here. Normally they used Joiners as guards. But not here! This barricade was guarded by the Presences themselves!

Barr studied the line of pointed stakes. He could see no place where he could slip through without being seen. The damnable floodlights made the whole scene as bright as day.

"Rita was right," he thought. "I can't get through here."

He had to get through! In the distance he could see a glow in the sky, a glow that could only come from many lights. It was this glow that he particularly wished to investigate. To do that, he had to pass the barricade.

He pulled the pistol out of his pocket, looked at it, then looked at the barricade. His face set in grim lines. For a momenut, so fierce was the expression on his face, an onlooker might have thought he was going to charge the barricade with only the pistol as a weapon. He had no such intention. He took a piece of cloth out of his pocket, wrapped the pistol in it, took off his leather cap, placed the pistol in that, then slid silently down the beach and into the sea. Silently he waded into the water. Then he began to swim. He swam slowly and easily, out to sea, using a breast stroke that did not break the surface of the water.

One floodlight was set directly on the beach, its beam pointing out to sea. He swam out and out, then turned and floated slowly into the beam of light.

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The water was cold. He could feel his heart pounding heavily. At any moment he might be seen. His flesh crawled at the thought. He kept swimming. No shout came from the shore. He swam through the beam of light and into the kindly darkness. He sighed in relief. He was past the barricade.

An hour later, Barr, concealed in a tangle of underbrush, was staring in horror at the scene before his eyes. He had reached the place where the glow in the sky originated. The glow came from hundreds of floodlights. Men, thousands of them, the slave gangs gathered by the Presences, were at work. The Uighur technicians, hundreds of them, were working too. Barr saw what they were doing.

One of the Uighur flying battleships had been forced down here. This must have happened years in the past, for the gaunt steel skeleton of the skull had rusted badly.

The Uighurs were rebuilding this ship! Gangs of slave workers were stripping away the badly rusted plates. Other gangs of workers, under the careful supervision of Uighur scientists, were busy putting new plates in place, new plates made of gleaming steel! In the background Barr could glimpse huge furnaces belching flame to the sky. He knew what they were—atomic furnaces that were being used to melt and shape the steel plates.

The Uighurs had managed to obtain a source of metal. They were rebuilding one of their flying battleships. With that ship fit to fly again, they would be supreme. Nothing could stand against them. Nothing! If they once succeeded in rebuilding this ship—

THEY must not succeed. They had to be stopped. How? Barr's mind flashed back to this tiny rocket flier, hidden in the Hudson valley above New York. There were atomic bombs in that ship, bombs that would blow hell out of anything they hit. A dozen of those bombs, striking here, would spread fragments of this battleship over half a county, especially if they struck the atomic furnaces. Bombing this area would be a risk, espcially since the Uighurs were undoubtedly determined to protect it at all costs. Damn the risk! It had to be taken. There was speed in his ship, speed to burn the wind. He would come over at a thousand miles an hour, come in on a long dive from out to sea, pass over so low the anti-aircraft beams would not be able to function, loose a sudden rain of bombs! Surprise would be on his side. The Uighurs were on the alert but they did not suspect the existence of a rocket flier and they would not be watching for one. Before they had time to organize their defenses, he would be over and gone.

He turned to slip away. He would need several days to reach his rocket flier but once he had reached it, he would be back here in minutes.

As he turned, he looked full into the blinding beam of a flashlight that had suddenly been turned on.

"Hands up!" a harsh, guttural voice grated in his ears.

He was trapped. For a split second, he crouched, deciding whether or not to run.

"If you move, we'll burn you!" the voice said again.

From the tone, from the harshness with which the words were spoken, and from the odd accent, Barr knew the truth. This was no Joiner patrol, armed with bows and arrows. This was a Uighur patrol. The Presences themselves had caught him. Slowly, an inch at a time, he raised his hands.

"Is better," the guttural voice spoke. There were three of them. One was holding the light, the other two were

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covering with deadly little projectors. They stepped closer.

"Turn around," the leader said.

Barr obeyed. To disobey would be to invite instant destruction. Rough hands went over him. When he had come out of the sea, he had taken the pistol out of his cap and had put it back into his pocket. They found the pistol. The leader grunted. Even in that moment Barr noted the lack of surprise in the leader's voice. It was as if the Uighur had expected to find the pistol, had been looking for it.

"Turn around again," he was ordered.

The light was focused on his face. He felt the keen scrutiny of the three Uighurs behind the light. They were studying him, looking him over. He was wearing a Joiner uniform but that would not gain him anything. The uniform was still wet, which could only mean that he had swam around the barricade. Besides, they had found a pistol on him. The pistol damned him. Even Joiners were not permitted to have pistols, especially Joiners found spying in a prohibited zone.

"Shoot me and have it over with," he grated. There was a blank feeling in his mind. All he could think of was that he had been caught. He was doomed. A short, quick death would be infinitely better than questioning at the hands of the Presences. He defied them in the sullen hope that they would be enraged enough to shoot him.

They didn't shoot. They seemed not to have heard him. Quietly they studied him and their quietness was an infinitely greater threat than bluster would have been. What were they going to do with him, he wondered.

Suddenly the leader spoke.

"Is he," he said.

The other two nodded agreement.

"Is the spy," the second said.

"Is Barr, the son of Old Barr," the third added.

"It is the man we were looking for," the leader said.

BARR stared at them in stunned astonishment. He could not believe he had heard correctly. They had called him by name, they had said he was the son of Old Barr, the famous leader of the Council of the Scientists.

"What the hell are you talking about?" he demanded.

"Have been waiting for you," the leader said. "Knew you were coming. The Great Presence will be pleased to know that the son of Old Barr has paid us a visit, very greatly pleased!" He laughed.

"You've been waiting for me?" Barr gasped.

"Right," the leader answered.

Barr could not believe his ears. They had been waiting for him. They had known he was coming.

There could be only one explanation for that fact. Somewhere, somehow, he had been betrayed!

"March!" the voice of the Uighur leader grated in his ears. "We take you to the Great Presence, who has some very interesting questions to ask you."

NOGO, the leader of the Uighurs, the Great Presence, was in his quarters when Barr was led in. He was sitting at a desk in a crude but comfortable wooden palace that had been erected for him here on the shore of the sea. Two guards stood rigidly at attention behind him.

Barr was surprised at the appearance of this Uighur. He had expected to find a barbarian, a huge hulk of a man dressed in a glittering uniform, his breast a blaze of medals, seated on a throne. Nogo was none of these things. He was wearing a plain leather uniform

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and except for the tiny golden lion heads on his shoulders, he wore no medals.* Instead of a throne, he was seated at a simple desk that might have belonged to anyone. There was no sign of ostentation about him anywhere. He looked like an ordinary private.

Yet he was Nogo, the Great Presence, the supreme leader of the Uighurs. He was the man who had planned the Uighur attack on the peoples of earth. He had been cursed in every language spoken on the planet, he had been—and still was—hated and feared in every place where free men gathered.

Ever since he had been able to talk, Barr had heard tales of this terrible man. It was Nogo who had ordered the massacre of a hundred thousand hostages held in New Orleans. It was Nogo who had decreed that London should be blotted from the face of the earth. He had committed a thousand crimes and nowhere had he done an act of mercy. Hearing the tales of this man, Barr had expected to find a beefy barbarian.

Instead he found a slender, suave, pleasant-faced individual. Nogo had the round face, the high cheek bones, and the slightly slanted eyes of the Mongol. He didn't look dangerous. Only the hot lights in his shoe button eyes showed the volcanic fury seething beneath.

Barr recognized him instantly. Once, as a part of a Joiner campaign, this suave face had appeared on a million posters. It had even been rumored that Nogo had died.

He hadn't died. He was here, in perfect health. At the sight of him, Bruce Barr gave up all hope of living.

Nogo sat quietly regarding him. Then, at his signal, the three Uighurs who had captured him saluted and left the room. The two guards did likewise. Barr found himself alone with Nogo.

"I am informed that you are Bruce Barr," Nogo said. "Is that correct?"

"Yes," the agent answered. Denial would gain him nothing. The patrol had already reported his identity.

"The son of James Barr?" Nogo continued.

"Yes," Barr said. He stood stiffly erect in front of the desk. In his mind was the wild thought that perhaps he could leap across the desk, throttle this Uighur leader before Nogo could call for help. It was a chance in a million but it was the only chance he had. They would certainly execute him for attacking Nogo but they were going to execute him anyway. Might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. He tensed his muscles for the leap, then stopped stunned at what was happening.

Nogo was rising from his seat. There was a pleasant smile on his face. He was holding out his hand. "It is a pleasure to meet the son of so distinguished a man," Nogo was saying. "Yes, Barr, it is a pleasure to meet you. I have often wanted to meet your father but the opportunity has been denied me."

Barr was too surprised to take the outstretched hand. That Nogo should offer to shake hands with anyone on earth, let alone with one of his most deadly enemies, was inconceivable. The Uighur leader seemingly did not notice that Barr did not accept the proffered hand. Instead he pulled a heavy chair to the side of the desk and smilingly invited Barr to be seated. From his desk he took a box which he opened. Barr noticed the box was made of gold and was studded with precious stones. It was filled with something almost

* Instead of using stars to designate the rank of a general, the Uighurs used tiny golden lion heads. They considered the lion as king of beasts and an officer who wore the lion's head, considered as king of men—Ed.

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equally precious—cigars.

"Do you smoke?" Nogo said taking no notice of Barr's confusion. "These are my own private brand, the remnants of the stock I had made for me before —ah—it ceased being possible to obtain them. I think you will find them to your liking."

"You—want me to—sit down?" Barr gasped. In his mind was the thought that he had gone mad, that he was suffering from an hallucination. No man, Joiner or otherwise, was ever permitted to sit down in the presence of even the humblest Uighur. One only sat down with equals and the Uighurs regarded no one as their equal. Yet here was Nogo, the Great Presence, not only asking him to sit down but pulling up a chair for him with his own aristocratic hands! It was madness of the highest order.

NOGO seemed to enjoy the confusion he had created. "Nonsense, Barr. Don't stand there staring at me as if I were an ogre. Of course I want you to sit down. Please be seated." The Great Presence waved his hand invitingly toward the chair.

Barr sat down. "What is this all about?" he demanded. He was committing a serious error and he knew it. One did not make demands of the Great Presence, one did not ask questions of Nogo. Strangely, the Uighur chieftan took no offense. There was a faintly amused twinkle in his eyes as he looked at Barr.

"It is quite simple," he said. "I want you to do something for me."

"You want me—" Barr could go no farther. The idea that Nogo could conceivably want anything of him was beyond his imagination.

"That is right," Nogo said. "I want you to carry a message to your Council. Inasmuch as you are the son of the leader of the Council, I assume that you will know how to reach them. The message I want you to carry is this," Nogo paused, looked thoughtfully at the slender cigar he was smoking. He appeared to meditate, to be choosing his words with care. "That the war shall end!" he spoke suddenly, abruptly, the words coming in explosive gusts of sound. "That there shall be peace between your people and my people. That fighting shall stop now and forever. That the Uighurs and your people shall work hand in hand at the common task of rebuilding a shattered world."

If an old and hungry man-eating tiger, coming suddenly upon a defenseless child in the forest, should refuse to attack the child and instead sit down and weep in repentance for all the other people he had eaten, the effect would have been no less startling and no less contradictory than a peace proposal from the lips of Nogo. And yet a peace proposal was a beautiful dream. That the war should cease, that fighting should come to an end— And there was no question but that the help of the Uighurs would be invaluable in rebuilding what had been destroyed. The Uighurs were the world's cleverest technicians and in the long centuries they had spent in their Tibetan citadel, they had amassed a vast store of scientific knowledge.

"Do you really mean it?" Barr whispered. He could not raise his voice above a whisper.

"I certainly do," Nogo answered firmly. There was a sad smile on his face. "I don't mind admitting to you that I have had a change of heart. I have come to see how useless was all the destruction I have loosed, how senseless was the slaughter I have ordered. Believe me, Barr, if I only could, I would set back in place every building I had

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torn down, I would breathe life back into every man I have killed."

Nogo rose to his feet, began to pace the floor. He looked like a restless ghost sorrowing over the enormity of its sins.

"You really want peace?" Barr asked.

"Most emphatically," Nogo answered. "I am sick of war, sick of fighting, sick of slaughter. I want no more of it." The fury faded from his voice. Again the sad smile came to his face. "Believe me when I say I am sorry for all the suffering I have brought to your people. Now, will you carry to your Council my peace message?"

Barr could not answer. A peace proposal from Nogo was too good to be true. He sensed a trap of some kind.

"If you are really sincere in your offer, why are you building this battleship?" he questioned. There was the flaw in Nogo's argument! If the Great Presence really wanted peace, why should he so frantically rebuild a fallen battleship?

"Because—" Thunder roared in Nogo's voice and fire flashed from his eyes—"because—and carry this message to your Council also—if I cannot have the peace I want, I will have mastery! I am offering peace. If it is refused, I will use this battleship I am rebuilding to destroy utterly every vestige of resistance to my will. Carry this message to your Council. Shall it be peace or shall it be war?"

BENEATH Nogo's suave exterior a lion slumbered. The lion came to life now, roaring its threat. "Carry my message to your Council!" Nogo thundered. "I assume you know where they are in hiding. I also assume you know how to reach them or at least how to communicate with them. Tell them to choose—for peace or for war!"

Before Barr could speak again, Nogo had clapped his hands. A guard quickly entered the room. To the guard Nogo said, "Escort this man beyond the barricades. See that he is unharmed. I shall expect him to return within two weeks. See that he is permitted to enter in safety."

"Two weeks, Barr, to carry your message. Is that enough time?"

Barr dazedly nodded. Two weeks would be more than enough time to fly to the hiding place of the Council and to return.

"Then take my message and go," Nogo thundered.

It was a surprised American who found himself escorted in safety beyond the barricade. He was alive! There was reason for surprise in that fact alone. When the Uighurs had caught him, he had thought his day had come. But instead of killing him, the Supreme Presence had sent him as a messenger to the Council, bearing an offer of peace. That Nogo, or any Uighur, should offer peace, was bewildering.

Was Nogo's offer a trap? Was it a ruse? Or was the offer genuine? What would Nogo gain by making a false offer of peace? Barr did not know the answer to any of these questions but there was one fact that kept coming back to him—the Uighurs had known he was coming. They had been on the lookout for him. That could only mean— Well, what could it mean?

He trudged along the sea shore toward the tiny fishing village where Rita and her companions were waiting. He was curious to see how they would react to the news he was bringing.

CHAPTER VI

Bruton's Terrible Secret

"WHERE in the hell have you been?" Bruton demanded, as

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Barr entered the hut where the latter was staying. "Where is Rita?" He looked past Barr to the door.

"Rita?" Barr asked. "Isn't she here? I sent her back with the mayor."

Bruton seemed relieved. "Then I guess she is still with him," he muttered. He looked at Barr. "Where have you been?"

"To the camp of the Uighurs," Barr answered.

He expected his announcement to make a sensation. It didn't. Everything got so quiet in the room that the popping of the smouldering bed of coals in the crude fireplace sounded excessively loud. Bruton didn't say a word. He looked up at Barr. There was a sudden tenseness on his heavy features. Nor did Burke or Harder speak but Barr was aware that they were looking intently at him.

"You've been where?" Bruton spoke at last, his voice choked and heavy.

"To the camp of the Uighurs," Barr answered steadily. "I have been talking to Nogo himself."

For a second, after Barr spoke, there wasn't a sound. Then, without speaking, Burke leaped to his feet. A knife glittered in the old flier's hand. He launched himself straight at Barr.

Barr leaped backward. He didn't have a gun. The Uighurs had not returned the pistol they had taken from him. And, of all the things he had expected to happen, he hadn't expected an attack without the slightest sign of warning. He leaped backward, lifting his fists.

As Burke charged toward him, Bruton thrust out a foot. The flier tripped, went down with a crash. Cursing he tried to get to his feet. Bruton knocked the knife out of his hands, fell on top of him.

Burke was mad with rage. "Let go of me!" he shouted, trying to point at Barr. "That man has betrayed us. If he has been talking to Nogo and has returned to us, it can only mean that in exchange for his life he has agreed to lead a Uighur patrol to us."

Barr listened in amazement at the charge. He had certainly not anticipated that this would happen. But now that it had happened, he could see the logic back of Burke's reasoning. A man who said he had been talking to Nogo, the Great Presence, was either crazy or he had betrayed his fellows. No one had ever talked to Nogo and remained alive to tell the story.

"Easy," Bruton said. He spoke to Burke but his eyes never left Barr. He had drawn a pistol.

"Shoot him," Burke demanded. "I don't give a damn if he is the son of the leader of the Council. He has betrayed us. Shoot him."

"I'll shoot him if it's necessary," Bruton answered grimly. "But first, let's see what he has to say. There is a possibility that we might not want to shoot him. Talk, fellow," he said to Barr. "You say you have been inside the forbidden area. How did you get through the barricade?"

"I swam around it," Barr answered.

This made an impression on them. Swimming around the barricade was so simple they had not thought of it.

"Damn me for a dumb ox!" Bruton grated. "I hadn't thought of that. Go on, Barr. What is this nonsense about talking to Nogo? Did you really talk to him?"

Barr told them exactly what had happened, how the patrol had captured him, how they had taken him to Nogo, and what Nogo had said. He omitted only one item, the fact that the Uighur patrol had known he was coming. When he had finished there was amazed incredulity on their faces.

"He actually sent you as a messenger

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to the Council, asking for peace?" Bruton dazedly whispered.

"That's exactly what he did," Barr answered. "I don't blame you for not believing me. I couldn't believe it myself. But Nogo seemed sincere. He seemed really to want peace. He says we can have what we want—peace or war—but if we choose war, he is rebuilding a battleship that will give him supreme power."

AGAIN there was silence in the room but this time there was no threat in the silence. Burke slowly got to his feet. He seemed to have forgotten that a few minutes before he had been wanting to kill Barr for a traitor. "Peace!" he whispered. "A chance to walk in the streets without wondering when the next bomb is coming down, a chance to live a normal life. Food. Clothes. A job. No more fighting. Peace—"

"Do—do you think Nogo really meant what he said?" Harder spoke. The radio expert was trembling.

"I don't know," Barr answered frankly. He was closely watching the reaction of these three men. They were no longer threatening him. Their whole attitude had changed. When they learned the message he carried, they ceased thinking he was a traitor. "That is a matter for the Council to decide."

"How are we going to get the message to them?" Bruton questioned.

"I thought we might return to New York and use our secret radio ' Barr said. He looked at Harder. ' as your equipment in operating order? Can you get a message through to the Council?"

"Certainly," the radio man promptly answered.

"I'm afraid it won't work," Bruton said. The black-bearded giant seemed lost in thought.

"Why not?" Harder demanded. "I have been in contact with the Council radio station many times."

"I grant that," Bruton answered. "And you also know how many times you have wondered whether you were really in contact with the Council station or with some Uighur station trying to track down our hidden transmitter. In something as important as a peace proposal coming from Nogo himself, the Council is not likely to believe any radio message is authentic. No! The radio is out." He turned to Barr. "Don't you agree with me?"

Barr hesitated. He knew from personal experience how little trust the Council put in radio reports, even when the reports came in on secret bands and were in code. The Uighurs were too expert in the use of radio for it to be trusted. Barr nodded slowly. "But how are we to get the message to the Council? I have only two weeks to bring back an answer—"

"I've got it!" Burke suddenly interrupted. "Your rocket ship! You fly back to the Council and make a personal report. They know you and when you report in person, they will have no choice except to believe you."

"That's the answer!" Bruton spoke enthusiastically. "We'll start immediately. That is," he looked at Barr, "if that is all right with you?"

Barr nodded. There was no time to waste. Cutting across the country, they would need at least six days to reach the spot where he had hidden the ship. It would be a hard, tiring journey and every mile of it would have to be made on foot. But it had to be made and the quicker they got started, the better. "I'll go find Rita," he said. "We'll start in ten minutes."

"THE girl?" the mayor asked blankly, when Barr had nudged him sufficiently awake to answer questions.

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"But she went after you! Do you not know where she is?"

"She went after me!" Barr blankly repeated. "What the devil are you talking about? I sent her back here, with you."

The old man shrugged. He was sleepy and a little scared. "You *told* her to come back with me," he explained. "But because you tell a girl to do something does not mean she will do it. She sent me back alone. Then she swam out in the ocean, after you."

Rita had followed him into the forbidden zone! She, too, had gone around the barricade. And—she hadn't come back!

"I'M GOING after her!" Barr said grimly. He had returned to the hut where Bruton, Harder, and Burke were waiting. Quickly he explained what had happened.

"You will do nothing of the kind," Bruton said bluntly. The bearded giant seemed to be boiling with rage. "If she wants to make a fool of herself by following you into the Uighur camp, she will have to look out for herself. You aren't going back after her. You have a job to do."

"But—"

"There are no buts!" Bruton exploded. "She will have to look out for herself. She is only one person. If she gets killed, it will be unfortunate. But you are the person who carries the peace proposal to the Council. If you try to rescue her and get yourself killed, Nogo may not make another peace offer. I am sorry about Rita but the whole future of the human race may depend on whether or not you get Nogo's peace message to the Council."

There was fury in Bruton's voice. For a moment Barr faced the bearded giant, tempted to tell him to go to hell. But he realized the truth back of Bruton's words. It was of the utmost importance that the peace proposal reach the Council, so important that beside it even Rita's safety did not matter. He also remembered another fact—the Uighurs had known he was coming. Somebody had told them about him. Rita had entered the forbidden area.

He tried to put the thought out of his mind but it persisted in returning. Someone had betrayed him to the Uighurs. Rita *might* have done it. It might have been someone else. He didn't know the name of the guilty person. All he knew was, in the bitter struggle going on, no one was ever certain who was friend and who was foe. As bitterly as he regretted it, there was only one thing to do—leave Rita behind. If she had betrayed him, she was in no danger. If she had not betrayed him, she would insist that he leave her behind.

"All right," he said. "Come on."

In silence they filed out of the tiny fishing village, into the night. For days they would be passing through blackened, abandoned country, where the hand of every man would be against them. They would have to travel day and night, sleep when they could, eat what they could find.

The message they carried might bring lights back to the darkness, green to the countryside, cities where blackened ruins now lay. Peace would bring these things. Peace would bring an end to the treacherous battle in which no man knew who was foe and who was friend.

Peace!

CHAPTER VII

Betrayal

THE little rocket ship was still hidden where he had left it! Barr's

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heart leaped at the sight.

"Well, we've reached it!" Bruton said. There was a sigh of relief in the voice of the giant. "And I don't mind saying, if it had been another mile, I don't believe I could have made it."

Bruton looked tired. The trip had drained even his rugged strength. Burke and Harder looked equally done in. For hours the old flier had looked as if he was running on his nerve and nothing else. But he had never uttered a whimper, trudging doggedly along.

Burke shook his head. He had scarcely the strength to speak. "Until I walked this far," he whispered, "I never realized what a privilege it was to fly."

"We won't have to walk any farther," Barr said.

"Thank God!" Burke fervently uttered.

Flying really was a privilege. The same distance that had taken days of weary walking they could cross in minutes. The little ship was hidden in a clump of oak trees, the dull gray of its metal sides barely visible. Barr hastened to it. A glance told him that the ship had not been discovered in his absence. He opened the lock, stepped forward into the tiny control room in the nose. Although it was a one-man flier, all four of them could cram into it.

"All aboard!" Barr called out. "Grab something and hold on. The pick-up on one of these babies is terrific."

Directly ahead was an opening between the trees that gave plenty of room for a take-off. Barr had selected this spot for a hiding place with the possible need of a quick take-off in mind. All he had to do was warm the tubes. He strapped himself into the pilot's seat, reached for the buttons on the control panel in front of him.

His fingers did not touch the buttons. A deafening explosion sounded behind him. He jerked his head around.

Harder was standing in the lock. There was a silly, dazed expression on his face. In his forehead was a round, bluish hole. For a split second, before the muscles that held him erect learned what had happened, he stood erect. His lips worked, trying to form words.

"You dirty — Uighu — ugh — "Thought you had a radio—ugh—all the time—aaah—" The last was a sigh, the kind of a sound that a dead man makes, the last sound that ever comes from the lips of a human. The radio expert's muscles suddenly discovered they were no longer receiving mental orders bidding them hold their master erect.

Harder slumped downward. He struck half inside, half out, of the ship, slid outside. For a moment there was a quivering rustle from the leaves on the ground beside the ship. Then there was silence.

Burke, squatting on the floor, was not moving a muscle. His eyes were fixed in terrible intensity on one thing —the pistol in Bruton's hand. A little stream of smoke was flowing out of the muzzle of the pistol.

Barr jerked at the straps holding him in the seat, trying to loosen the buckles. At the same time he was looking back over his shoulder. The pistol swung in his direction.

"If you want to die," said Bruton calmly, "just loosen those straps before I tell you to."

Barr could see the giant's fingers tighten around the trigger. He jerked his hands into the air.

"That's better," Bruton said.

"You—you—" Barr choked. He remembered what Harder had been trying to say.

"Yes, I am a Uighur," Bruton said. "The idea that a Uighur might lower

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himself enough to pretend to be a Joiner did not occur to you, did it? It did occur to Harder, especially after he caught me operating a tiny radio that I carry. He became very suspicious after that, and I knew he would communicate his suspicions to you at the first opportunity. So I shot him."

Bruton licked his lips.

BARR stared at him in horrid fascination. Bruton was a Uighur! He was a Presence! Too late Barr saw the slight slant of the giant's eyes, too late he realized that the black beard had been grown to conceal the round face and the high cheek bones of the Mongol. An Uighur in disguise! The thought had not occurred to him but it explained a hundred things that had puzzled him.

"You—the Uighurs knew I was coming," he whispered. "When I entered their camp, they were watching for me. You—you told them!"

"Naturally," Bruton nodded. "As Harder discovered, I have a tiny radio transmitter. I used it to transmit information about your movements to the camp. The guards were on the alert for you."

"But why?" Barr almost shouted. "Why go to all of the trouble to let me enter the camp?"

"We had a use for you." Bruton answered.

"A use for me?" Barr whispered. There was a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. Even worse than the fact that he had been fooled was the thought that he had been used. "What use did you have for me, other than to carry your leader's proposal for peace?"

"Peace!" Bruton laughed, a harsh, scornful sound. "I thought that peace offer would take you in. Peace! Don't you know that a Uighur never makes peace except on his own terms? You fool! *What we wanted was this ship!* We used you to lead me to it. And a hard time I had forcing you to use your rocket flier to personally carry the great Nogo's message to the Council instead of transmitting it by radio. We wanted this ship, fool! We wanted it in our possession or destroyed. When you first showed up in New York I tried to get you to use it to fly over the forbidden area. With my warning that you were going to use the ship, we could have knocked it out of the sky. But you—" The Uighur seemed actually angry because his first trap had failed. " — didn't fall for the snare, which forced us to use other methods. And I may say that our fake peace offer took you in completely. As soon as you heard our offer, you led us straight to where we wanted to go—the place where this ship was hidden."

Barr's mind reeled under the torrent of words. He felt sick, mentally and physically. The peace offer had not been genuine! It had been a trap. And he had fallen for it. From the very moment of his arrival in New York, his whereabouts and his intentions had been known to the Uighurs. Probably even the sentinels at the gates had known he was coming. There hadn't been a moment, even a second, when his life had not hung by a thread. At any time, Bruton could have killed him. Bruton had let him live—to lead the Uighur here!

The Presences must think this single rocket flier was damned important.

"You haven't realized how important this ship is," the Uighur said, as if he sensed Barr's thoughts. "If you had chosen to sneak over our camp at sixty thousand feet, dropping a rain of bombs, you could have caused enough damage to stop our construction for a year, maybe longer. If you had known

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enough to attack—" The Uighur broke off. His eyes drilled into Barr. "But you don't know enough to attack *that*."

"Attack what?" Barr said.

Bruton bit his lips, as if he had already said more than he intended. "Loosen those straps and stand up!" he ordered harshly. "And if you are tempted to try to jump me, remember we don't need you any more. I would just as soon leave you here with Harder." He jerked a thumb toward the open lock.

Barr disengaged the straps. He made no false moves. Too well he knew how little the Uighur valued his life, now that he was no longer of use to them. With Bruton's pistol covering him, he got to his feet.

"Tie him," Bruton said to Burke. "And do a good job of it."

The old flier had not moved a muscle. He climbed slowly to his feet. Under Bruton's watchful eyes, he did an expert job of trussing Barr and throwing him on the floor.

THEN, somewhat to Barr's surprise, Burke himself was tied up, the Uighur doing the job efficiently.

"What's the matter, aren't you in on this too?" Barr questioned.

The old flier did not answer. The look of hatred he shot at Bruton sufficiently indicated his feelings.

With his two helpless passengers, the Uighur lifted the ship into the sky, headed south. From inside his clothes he pulled out a tiny radio transmitter. He spoke in Uighur but there was no mistaking the meaning of what he said.

He was reporting to Uighur headquarters the successful fulfillment of his mission!

BRUTON landed the ship in the middle of the Uighur camp. He was received by a crowd of enthusiastic Uighurs. Nogo himself came out of his quarters to congratulate Bruton.

"They're making quite a hero out of him," Burke said bitterly. The two men were still lying on the floor of the flier but they could see out the open lock. No effort had been made to untie them. The Uighurs were above doing anything for the comfort of their prisoners.

"Do you have any idea what they will do to us?" Barr questioned.

The old flier shook his head. "The best we can hope is that they will shoot us. The next best is that they will put us in one of their work battalions." In spite of his obvious effort to repress it, a shudder passed over Burke as he spoke. The old flier had seen too much of the Uighurs to have any false ideas about mercy from them.

"Anyhow," said Barr viciously, "Bruton sprung his trap too quickly, If he had been able to wait, I would have led him straight to Council headquarters. He could have learned the recognition signals, the location of the labs, everything; then, when they got their battleship finished, they could have blown Council headquarters right out of the ground."

Barr did not doubt that Bruton's original plan had included all this. Somehow Harder had discovered the identity of the Uighur. Harder had paid for that discovery with his life but Bruton had been forced to reveal his hand and the Council was safe. The Council had other rocket ships. Not many. They wouldn't need many. One of them, loaded with atomic explosives, operated by a robot pilot, rammed home against the Uighur dreadnaught, would be enough. The Uighurs, even if they had managed to find the metal to rebuild one ship, could never find the metal to rebuild two. The fight was not yet lost! As long as the Coun-

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cil remained in existence, the fight would go on.

"They're up to something new," Burke spoke.

Through the lock, Barr could see the ceremonial backslapping in honor of Bruton had died down. The Uighur and Nogo were in conference. Bruton was urging some course of action and the Great Presence was listening thoughtfully. The conversation was in Uighur, which neither of the two Americans understood.

"I guess it wouldn't make any difference if *we* did know what they're planning," Burke said. "But just the same, I'd like to know."

"It looks as if we're going to find out," Barr answered.

Bruton and Nogo had finished their conference. Nogo, after nodding agreement, went back into his quarters. Bruton entered the ship.

"I hope you have rested comfortably," he said. He was strutting like a turkey cock. Apparently the praise his leader had given him had been very flattering.

Neither of the men answered.

Bruton looked at Barr. "You are a lucky person," he said. "You find yourself in the enviable position of being able to help the plans of the Presence. Of course you will co-operate."

"Certainly," Barr said. "What do you want?" His voice was heavy with sarcasm which Bruton apparently missed.

"We want to know the exact location of your Council headquarters and we want the recognition signals that will enable your rocket flier to get past the anti-aircraft defenses that no doubt exist."

"You want what?" Barr gasped.

"I plan to go to your headquarters, disguised as a Joiner," Bruton explained. "There I will tell them that you are held prisoner and will propose a plan for your rescue, a plan, I may add, which will involve the use of all the fliers the Council possesses. I will then lead all your rocket fliers into a trap. Pouf! You will have no more rocket ships!"

BRUTON grinned. He had conceived a daring and audacious plan. And, the worst thing about it, it would work! Barr saw instantly that it would work. He set his mouth in a grim line.

"No sale," he said.

"You mean you will not co-operate?" Bruton demanded.

"That is exactly what I mean," Barr answered.

"But this is a wonderful opportunity to serve the Presence," the Uighur answered. "Such an opportunity is not given to many of your tribe. If you still harbor hopes that your Council can continue to exist, I assure you such hopes are without foundation. Whether you help or not, we shall destroy all resistance organized against us. In that case it is obviously to your advantage to get on our good side now. When we are masters, we will remember those who have helped us. Surely, under these circumstances, you will co-operate."

It was a moving and persuasive argument but it fell on deaf ears.

"I'm not hearing good today," Barr said.

"But—"

"Oh, for Pete's sake, shut up!" Barr snapped. "I'm not having any of your sales talk."

"You mean—"

"In other words, go to hell!" Barr said.

Anger flushed Bruton's face. He started to speak and changed his mind.

"Good boy," Burke grunted.

Bruton stalked out of the ship. Out-

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side they could hear him shouting in Uighur.

"You're a brave lad," Burke said quietly. "Knowing you has been a privilege. I didn't know there were men left in the world with the guts to tell a Presence where to get off."

"Knowing me?" Barr whispered. "Why—why the past tense? Do—do you think you won't know me much longer?"

The old flier did not answer. Barr sensed his meaning. It sent a shock to the bottom of his soul. "No matter what they do to me," he spoke from between clenched teeth, "I won't talk."

Burke said nothing. In stolid silence the two men awaited the return of Burton. The Uighur returned, with a squad at his heels. He grunted. Like two sacks of sand, the stolid Uighurs picked up the two men and carried them away.

CHAPTER VIII

The Slave Gangs of the Uighurs

BARR expected torture. Knives, hot irons, whips. The Uighurs, in spite of their scientific knowledge, were savages in the field of human relations. The death of others meant nothing to them. Barr steeled himself. His face set in hard, grim lines. Knobs appeared at the corners of his jaws and his mouth closed to a knife-slit. Death on the battlefield, he could have faced. But whether he could face torture, he did not know. Until the time comes, no one ever knows. Barr's time had come.

The Uighurs carried the two men into a small building. They didn't say a word. Barr caught a glimpse of some complicated-looking machinery in the room where he was taken. There were two Uighurs in charge. Barr found himself strapped to a rough table. Bruton leaned over him.

"Last chance," Bruton said. "Do you want to co-operate or don't you?"

"Go to hell," Barr answered.

"Don't say I didn't warn you," the Uighur said.

"You can still go to hell!"

Bruton nodded. The two Uighurs who had been present in the room moved up to the table where Barr was strapped down. He could not see what they were doing. He felt one of them touch his arm. There was a sharp prick of pain. It felt like the blade of a sharp knife laying open the flesh. Or the prick of a needle.

"This is it," he thought. He set himself against a repetition of the pain. It didn't come. He couldn't move his head, but out of the sides of his eyes he saw one of the Uighurs laying aside a hypodermic syringe.

They had given him a hypodermic! He was aware that they were watching him closely. "I won't talk!" he thought. *"I won't—"* He found himself staring at the Uighurs. Somewhere in his mind was the vague thought that if he stared hard enough at them he could force them to go away. He stared fiercely at them. Oddly, they began to go away. They seemed to move back, out of his range of vision, out of focus. They were blending into a strange gray mist. They went out of sight into the grayness. The gray mist grew. It came closer and closer to him. It pressed against him, obscuring his vision. It rolled over him, smothering him. He tried to breathe, and choked in a gray cloud. He strained to see, and his eyes brought him only a vision of grayness. He listened. There was a dull throb in his ears and in the distance—in the infinitely far distance—he could hear voices.

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"What is the recogrition signal?" the voices said.

"Go—to—hell—" he answered.

The mist thickened. It flowed over and around him and through him. It thickened into a pearl-gray cloud so solid he was certain he could walk upon it. He decided to try to walk on it. Well! It was certainly odd to be walking on a cloud!

BRUCE BARR walked for hours in a land of clouds. It was a pleasant sensation, this strolling among masses of tumbling foam, but always on the horizon he was aware of a dark shadow like a black thunderhead threatening storm. In spite of the pleasure of cloud walking, he sensed that somewhere something was not right. He tried to determine what was wrong, but it constantly eluded him, slipping around the edges of his mind like an elusive phantom.

Then abruptly the cloud mass thinned and he began to fall. A scream ripped from his lips. He was falling, falling. He screamed again. He hit the ground with a thump which somehow dissolved the last lingering mists of cloud and opened his eyes.

He was sitting on the ground in a crude hut. Across from him, in an attitude of utter dejection, another man was sitting. The other man raised his head and Barr recognized him. Burke. With recognition memory came flooding back.

Barr looked wildly around. His last memory was of a voice in the far distance asking questions. He had been strapped to a table. Uighurs had been bending over him. Now he was sitting on the ground and the Uighurs were gone.

"What—what happened?" he whispered.

Burke gazed unemotionally at him, but did not answer.

Barr climbed to his feet, seized the arm of the older man. "What happened?" he demanded. "What did they do to me?" There was frantic fear in his voice.

Burke looked at the ground. "Nothing," he said.

"Nothing!" Barr whispered. "What—what did I do?"

Burke looked up. When he spoke there was no harshness in his voice, no sign of condemnation, but there was so much pain it hurt just to listen to him.

"You spilled your guts," he said.

Barr did not understand. "Do—do you mean I talked?" he choked.

Burke nodded. He looked at the ground. "You told everything you ever knew," he said, his voice hollow and cracked. "You gave them the recognition signals, the location of Council headquarters, landmarks to guide them there. You told them how many men the Council had, how the labs were equipped, how they were defended—" The old flier's voice husked into silence.

Barr sank to the ground. From outside there came the ring of heavy hammers beating steel into shape, the muted roar of atomic furnaces, the shouts of Uighur overseers directing the labor of slave gangs—all the sounds of a vast construction job moving efficiently forward. "What—what did they do to me?" Barr asked.

"Gave you some kind of a drug that made you tell the truth," Burke said.*

"You've been unconscious for

* Scopolamine is such a drug. It is made from henbane and has the strange power of submerging the inhibitory areas of the brain that are used in fabricating self-protective stories—in other words, lies. A person under the influence of scopolamine is deprived of the power of inventing falsehoods. Hence it is frequently called the *truth drug*.—Ed.

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hours," the old flier continued. "Bruton loaded your ship with Uighurs disguised as Joiners and took off. He has probably already reached headquarters by now." Burke shook his head. In the gesture was a sadness beyond words.

"I'm sorry," Barr whispered.

"Not your fault," Burke answered. "You couldn't help talking. It's just too bad. That's all—just too bad."

He didn't say any more, but Barr knew what he meant. It was too bad that the last organized resistance to the Uighurs was probably being liquidated at that moment.

Outside the hut the clang of hammers were loud in the heavy air. There was the hiss of cutting torches, the boom of sheets of metal being dropped —all the noise that goes with the repair of a battleship of the air. Above the clamor a step sounded. A Uighur looked in, saw that Barr had regained consciousness. He motioned for the two men to come out.

Burke got slowly to his feet. "We join the labor gangs working for the conqueror," he said. "Come on."

The two men walked out of the hut. "You two go join the gang down at the sea shore," the Uighur snarled. "Get moving!"

Neither man answered. Barr pulled his leather cap down until it shielded his eyes and trudged in the direction the overseer had indicated. There was a droop in his shoulders and a stoop in his back.

AT THE shore of the sea they learned one fact that, a few days before, would have seemed important. They learned where the Uighurs were getting the metal they were re-forging into the new plates for their fallen battleship.

Dozens, hundreds of wrecked ships were lying on the beach. They were piled up there like so much cordwood. There was nothing as large as an ocean liner or a battleship, but there were cruisers, destroyers, small cargo vessels by the score. Obviously they had come from one place—the bottom of the sea. The hulls were encrusted with barnacles, overgrown with sea weeds. These vessels had been sunk in the early days of the conflict and in earlier wars. They showed the marks of torpedoes and of bombs—great holes gaped in the hulls.

"The only source of scrap metal remaining on earth!" Barr gasped. "Trust those dogs to find it!"

"Shut up and get to work!" an overseer shouted.

They were sent to join gangs scraping barnacles from the hulls, clearing away debris. It was hard, back-breaking work, with no respite. There were no rest periods, no time out for a drink of water, no time out for anything. Other gangs with cutting torches followed them up, cutting the vessels into sections that could be handled. The ships had been under water for years, but there was still good stout steel in the hulls. The Uighurs, in recovering metal from sunken ships, had struck a bonanza. Suggestions for the floating of sunken vessels had been made to the Council, but had been given up as impractical. Pulling ships from the bottom of the ocean was darned difficult. Barr wondered how even the Uighurs had managed to solve the problem. He put the question to one of the men working near him.

A stare and a shake of the head was the only answer. Later, when Barr repeated the question, he whispered, "If you want to stay alive around here, keep your damned mouth shut. The Presences don't like us to do any talking." The man refused to say more.

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The question of how the Uighurs managed to get ships from the bottom of the sea remained a mystery. In the dull sickness that had come over him when he learned he had revealed the hiding place of the Council, Barr could not see how the solution of this mystery mattered. Nothing mattered now.

THAT night Barr learned that something did matter. The day shift worked until darkness, a twelve-hour day. Then they were herded away, fed tough cakes made of ground corn. After they had eaten, they were allowed to sleep. Little or no attempt was made to guard them. The Uighurs knew the slaves could not escape through the barricade surrounding the whole area; they also knew that after the slaves had worked all day, they had only enough strength to stagger off some place and fall asleep. Barr had been going at top speed for weeks. The terrible labor on the wrecked ships left him almost completely exhausted. After he had been fed, he staggered into a grove of trees and collapsed. The earth was a hard bed, but that did not matter. He was asleep as soon as he had touched the ground.

He awakened to the touch of an arm on his shoulder. "Bruce," a voice whispered in the darkness. "Bruce. Wake up."

Even in dreams he would have known that voice. Startled, he sat up.

"Shh— Don't make any noise," the voice whispered urgently.

"Rita!" he gasped. "Where did you come from? How did you get here?"

"Sh!" she said sharply. "I swam around the barricade. I've been hiding here ever since, trying to find you. I was sure they were holding you prisoner, but I couldn't find you until today, when I saw you with the labor gangs."

"You've been hiding here since the night I swam around the barricade!" he gasped. "Hiding in the middle of the Uighur camp!"

"It wasn't hard. They didn't know I was here and consequently they weren't looking for me. And most of the time I've been hiding in a place where even the Uighurs would never think of looking for anyone. And, Bruce, I've made the most astonishing discovery—"

Her voice was tense with excitement.

"Bruce, I think I've found a way to smash this whole nest of Uighurs. I think I've found a way to stop them, cold!"

"You've *what?*" Barr choked. He seized her by the shoulders. "What are you talking about? What do you mean?" He could feel the sudden pound of his heart as his whole body reacted to what the girl had said. A way to smash the Uighurs! He would give his heart's blood for a way to blast the Presences. If she only knew what she was talking about—

"Sh!" she whispered. "Come over here and I'll tell you."

She crawled silently away in the darkness. Barr followed her. Her words had washed all fatigue from his body. He was wide awake, more awake than he had ever been. Rita knew a way to smash the Uighurs! She led him to a thick clump of trees.

"What have you discovered?" he whispered.

"How the Uighurs get those wrecked ships out of the ocean!" she answered.

"Why is that so damned important?"

"Because I think I know how to stop it. Without metal they will not be able to complete their repair job. And as we stop them from raising sunken ships, at the same time I think we can blow this camp to smithereens. Listen, Bruce—" She looked around in the

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darkness, to make certain no one was near them.

From the distance came the muted clamor of hammers beating against steel, the hiss of atomic furnaces, the shouts of Uighur foremen driving their slave gangs. Around them was silence and darkness.

"This is what I have discovered," the girl said.

Barr listened. Her voice was a tense whisper in the darkness. With growing amazement, he heard what she had to say.

Hope began to rise in his heart.

"Rita," he whispered fiercely, when she had finished, "I believe you've got it. I believe you've got the answer." There was exultation in his voice. If he had any doubts, he kept them well concealed.

"Come on," the girl said. "We haven't a moment to lose."

Dodging Uighur patrols, walking furtively through the darkness, crawling where it was not safe to walk, they reached the seashore. Far out over the dark waters lights were beginning to flash.

"It's coming in," the girl whispered. "We'll wait until it goes back out, then we'll swim out to it. That is how I discovered what it was—by swimming out to it."

The sea monster was coming to shore, the same sea monster that Barr and Rita, and the mayor of the fishing village, had watched from a headland farther up the coast. They watched it again.

The ponderous bulk moved slowly to the shore.

"Come on," Rita said. "We start swimming now. We'll catch it as it goes back to sea."

She slid into the ocean. Barr followed her. They swam silently out into the dark expanse of waters.

CHAPTER IX

NOGO, the Great Presence, was a stern disciplinarian. Every morning at the crack of dawn it was his custom to call his aides and inspect the men under his command. A great part of the military efficiency of the Uighurs was due to these constant inspections. Nothing escaped Nogo's eye.

Nogo was making his morning inspection. He was not in a good humor. In the first place, the regular morning check-up had disclosed that nine of the slaves had died during the night, three of them obviously by suicide. The fact that nine men had died meant nothing to Nogo—he had ordered the death of millions—but he hated to lose workers, especially now that the work of rebuilding the battleship was progressing so well.

And when the regular check-up revealed that one worker was missing and when this missing man was tentatively identified as Bruce Barr, son of the leader of the Council, Nogo almost had a fit.

"Do you call this efficiency?" he shouted. "A man walks out of this camp as if we had no guards. Lieutenant," he snapped to one of his aides, "determine the guard who let this man escape and execute him immediately."

The lieutenant saluted and dashed off on his errand of death. There would be merry hell to pay among the Uighur guards at the barricade. That any man should escape annoyed Nogo. That Bruce Barr should be the man infuriated him. As long as one of the leaders of the Council remained alive, he would rally men against the Uighurs. Barr was was one of the leaders.

At the atomic furnaces Nogo received news that put him in a little better humor. Everything here was progressing splendidly. The work was ahead of

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schedule and the supply of steel was adequate. The Great Presence unbent sufficiently to congratulate the inventor who had secured the supply of steel for the Uighurs.

"A very great invention, your sea robot," Nogo said to the inventor, Lasar. Lasar was a squat, powerfully-built Mongol. As a reward for his invention, he had already been made a member of Nogo's personal staff. He glowed at his leader's praise.

"Thank you, Great Presence," Lasar said bowing. "Your Presence had often thought of the great supply of steel in sunken ships resting on the sea bottom. I was fortunate enough to devise a means of recovering it."

"A very clever solution," Nogo said. "A gigantic robot to walk on the bottom of the sea, enduring pressures no diver could stand, a robot strong enough to lift whole ships and to carry them ashore, a robot, moreover, with a mechanical mind to enable it to carry out its task without the need for constant supervision, yes, that was a very clever solution to our problem."

"It was nothing," the inventor said, pretending to be humble. "I merely took the robot pilot our enemies had developed to handle their planes and adapted it to our purpose."

Nogo frowned at that. He did not like to be reminded that the rest of the human race had produced anything the Uighurs found fit to use. Lasar hastily dropped the subject of his sea robot when Nogo frowned.

A few minutes later Nogo's frown turned into a delightful smile. An officer from the radio station came hurrying up. He saluted.

"What is it?" Nogo asked.

"I have a message from Bruton, Great Presence," the radio officer said.

"What does Bruton say?" Nogo eagerly asked.

"He reports" the radio officer was so excited he was panting. "He reports, Great Presence, that his mission has been entirely successful. He was admitted to Council headquarters, he and the men with him succeeded in setting off explosions that caused great damage in the laboratories, and while the stupid council members were trying to bring under control the fires caused by the explosions, Bruton and his comrades succeeded in escaping with the three rocket ships possessed by our enemies. He is now on his way here with the three captured ships!"

"Wonderful!" Nogo said, beaming. "That is the kind of initiative I like to see my men display. I shall promote Bruton to the rank of general as soon as he returns. Three rocket ships captured! The secret laboratories of the Council destroyed by explosions! This is wonderful news."

Nogo beamed. His staff broke into a cheer. From their viewpoint, they had indeed received wonderful news. The secret base of the Council discovered and invaded! The laboratories destroyed. The only three rocket ships the Council possessed captured!

"The war is over!" Nogo announced. "This finishes it. There is no longer any organized opposition to our order. The Uighurs are victorious!"

THE news was quickly spread over the entire camp. From every quarter came fierce shouts of joy from Uighur throats. The long war was over. The Presences had won! Of the mighty winged legions that had flown out of Central Asia, only this handful gathered here on the shores of the Atlantic remained. All the others had died for the cause. Their deaths did not matter. All that mattered was that the Uighurs had emerged triumphant!

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Nogo, beaming with joy, was already dreaming of plans for the rebuilding of earth—on Uighur lines. He saw the slow reconstruction of the cities, the repopulation of the farms, the reopening of the mines. He saw millions of people of the inferior races working for the Uighurs. He saw the Presences as a great ruling caste, masters of earth forever.

This was the hour of Nogo's triumph. He, the Great Presence, had planned the Uighur exodus from Central Asia. Now his plans had borne fruit. Now his people were masters over earth, and he was master over them! The dawn of this new day—and already the sky in the east was bright with streaks of light—marked the beginning of Uighur domination of the planet. In the great encampment, fierce shouts of joy rang out. The thousands of ragged, weary slaves looked doubtfully at each other, wondering what was causing so much joy among their masters. Then they learned the source of the joy but they did not join in the shouting. They looked at the ground. Some of them wept.

Suddenly, from the direction of the sea, there came a shrill whistle. A few of the Uighur overseers and some of the slaves looked toward the sound. They had heard this whistle before. It came from the sea robot and it announced that this great monster was coming out of the ocean with another steel ship clutched in its mighty hands.

Gradually the robot emerged from the water. It was holding a ship. Slowly, ponderously, it splashed toward the shore. It started toward the place where the wrecked ships were piled. Then it seemed to become confused. It did not seem to know where to go. It stood there on the beach, mighty legs thrusting deep into the sand, holding the ship it had brought from the ocean depths. It whistled again, a low, mournful sound. The lights on its head went off and on. It did not deposit the ship in the pile where the vessel was supposed to go.

The Uighur overseer who was in charge of the wrecked hulls, knew that something was wrong with the robot. He was sure that nothing much was the matter but he sent a messenger running to summon Lasar. Probably some minor mechanical difficulty, the overseer thought. Lasar would know how to fix it. Personally the overseer was amazed that the robot had functioned as well as it had.

WHEN the messenger reported to him, Lasar hastily asked Nogo's permission to leave the Presence. "Something is out of order on my robot," Lasar explained. "I am needed to correct it. Do I have your permission to depart?"

"Certainly," Nogo nodded. He was in excellent humor. "We will stroll down to the shore and watch you make the necessary repairs."

The Great Presence and his staff started to walk leisurely toward the beach. Before they reached their destination, they heard a ponderous clanking. In the dawn light they could see a vast bulk moving toward them.

"Is your robot coming ashore?" Nogo demanded, staring at the moving bulk. "I thought it was built so that it would not come farther ashore than the place where the wrecked ships are piled?"

"Something has gone wrong," Lasar hastily said. "I will correct it immediately."

"See that you do!" Nogo sternly commanded.

The inventor ran toward the robot. He carried with him a small radio transmitter. A receiver had been built into the robot and had been tuned to the frequency of Lasar's transmitter. The transmitter had not been designed

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to carry voice signals—to build a device into the robot so it would respond to spoken words would have been too difficult even for Lasar—but had been constructed to transmit simple orders such as Stop, Go, Back Up, Turn Around, depending on which transmitting button was punched. These radio implses, in case of an emergency, controlled the actions of the robot.

Lasar punched the Stop button on his transmitter. When this was done, the robot was supposed to stop.

The robot didn't stop. It kept moving.

"Stop it!" Nogo shouted.

"I'm trying to stop it," Lasar answered. The inventor was sweating. Frantically he punched the buttons on his transmitter. He punched them all. The robot whistled shrilly, lights flashed on its head, indicating the orders were being received, but it kept moving.

Clanking, gears whining, the earth shaking as the mighty metal feet struck the ground, the robot moved along. Suddenly it stopped. Nogo and his staff stared at it, appalled. A sudden silence swept over the Uighur camp. The victorious shouts of exultation were stilled. Even the slaves looked up, wondering what was happening.

The robot was carrying a small ship. Gears screaming in protest at the weight, it lifted the ship above its head. Like a giant hurling a heavy rock, it threw the ship—straight at the atomic furnaces.

The fires of hell seethed in those furnaces. Steel was being melted in their hot interiors. In the atomic vortices that fed heat to the furnaces, inconceivable pressures were held in check.

The ship struck the furnaces and the vortices that fed them. It knocked the furnaces over, smashed the vortices. Little darting streamers of flame, like red-hot devils suddenly released from the Pit, leaped toward the sky.

BOOM!

The furnaces exploded. Great gouts of molten steel leaped into the air. The earth seemed to hunch itself together, then to spring outward. Debris, dirt, bits of smashed metal, droplets of red-hot steel mushroomed up, up, up into the sky. A roaring volcanic blast of sound tore holes in the air. A thousand thunderstorms were concentrated into a single blast of fury.

IN NEW YORK they heard that explosion, and wondered what had happened. Down to the south, in what had once been Maryland and Virginia, they heard the roar, felt the earth shake. It was heard in New England, in Pennsylvania, in upper New York state.

Most of all it was heard in the great Uighur encampment on the Jersey shore. Uighurs, knocked to the ground by the concussion, found themselves in the midst of falling debris. Part of that debris was red-hot steel.

Nogo and his staff were knocked flat. A great chunk of metal, the top of a furnace, hit the ground with a thud. It did not strike the Great Presence but it got at least half of his staff. Nogo scrambled to his feet. Deafened by the explosion, he stared around him. He saw the robot, rocking from the fury of the explosion, right itself and start ponderously back to sea. It was still whistling. Now there was a note of triumph in its whistle.

"Destroy that thing!" Nogo shouted. "It's gone mad—"

"No, Great Presence," the inventor wildly protested. "If we destroy it, years will be needed to build another. Without it, we can never secure steel from the sea bottom—"

"It has smashed my furnaces," Nogo howled. "Destroy it."

"Something went wrong," Lasar pled.

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"Instead of placing the ship where it was supposed to, it made a mistake and set the ship down at the furnaces. It was only a mistake, Great Presence, a mistake. Something went wrong mechanically. It can be corrected. If we destroy the robot, we may never be able to make another one."

The inventor's frantic pleas had their effect on Nogo. He quite clearly realized that without the robot, there would be no steel ships coming from the ocean bottom. Without steel, he would be helpless. Great destruction had resulted from the robot's mistake but the damage could be repaired. New furnaces could be built.

"Then stop it!" Nogo shrieked.

The robot was marching ponderously toward the sea. It was on the beach. Lasar frantically worked the buttons on his transmitter. This time the robot stopped. Whistling questioningly, it stood there on the beach.

"See, it has stopped!" Lasar panted. "It is all right now. It is obeying commands. It can be completely overhauled and repaired."

The robot stood on the beach. There was an air of stupid deliberation about it, as if it were trying to make up its mechanical mind. Frightened technicians were running toward it. There were steel hand holds on the monster's legs. Uighurs were swarming up these ladders.

CHAPTER X

Last Chance for Tomorrow

IN THE heart of the operating mechanism of the robot, Bruce Barr stared out at the destruction he had wrought. With fierce exultation he saw the blast furnaces explode. After that, he had a fight on his hands, trying to keep the mighty monster from losing its balance. If it fell over, all the king's horses would never set it up again.

In the hours that had passed after they had boarded the robot as it went back to sea he and Rita had disconnected all the automatic controls of the monster, including the radio controls built into the mechanism. The monster, its mechanical brain disconnected, was no longer a robot. It was a gigantic war machine and it obeyed his commands. Hurriedly he operated the levers as it swayed from the blast of the explosion. He fought it back into balance, turned it, started it back to the shore.

Looking outward, he had a perfect view of all the destruction he had caused. The furnaces were gone. Now let the Uighurs re-smelt steel! Let them try! Months would be needed to rebuild those furnaces.

Below him he clearly saw the panic in the camp. This was probably the first time that an Uighur army had gone into a panic. This was the first time one of their own inventions had been used against them. The big cause of the panic was that they didn't know their weapon was being used against them. They thought the robot was out of order. They had no idea that their enemies were secreted in the middle of its complicated machinery.

Barr saw Uighurs fleeing madly. The guards at the barricades were deserting their posts. Confused, they did not know whether to attack the robot or to run. Panic swept through them and they started to run. Panic also swept through the slaves. They had no idea what was happening. All they knew was that hell was walking on earth-shaking feet through the camp. The slaves began to run. The guards at the barricades had deserted their posts. The slaves ran from the encampment. Barr, seeing them go, sighed in vast relief.

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On the beach he stopped the robot.

"What are we stopping for?" Rita shouted. She was below him at the ray guns Lasar had had built into the robot in the event it was ever needed as a weapon. "We've got to get out of here. They'll be after us hot and heavy."

"I'm thinking," Barr said. "I've got an idea."

"This is no time to have ideas!" the girl shouted. "This is the time to run. Get this thing submerged before the Uighurs recover their presence of mind."

"No," Barr said.

"What do you mean?"

"While we're here, we might as well do a good job. Come on, Charlie, get into action."

He swung the robot up the beach.

"What are you going to do?" Rita screamed.

"Watch and see!" Barr answered.

He stopped the gigantic monster beside the ships that were piled like cordwood on the bench. "You brought 'em here, Charlie," he said, patting the control levers. "You take 'em away."

Slowly, ponderously, under his guidance, the robot bent, picked up a ship, lifted the vessel into the air, flung it into the Uighur camp. It hit with a thunderous crash, rolled along the ground. Everything that was in its way fell before it. It rolled half way across the camp.

"Get another one, Charlie!" Barr yelled. The robot bent to pick up another ship.

"There are Uighurs on the ladders coming up the legs!" Rita suddenly screamed.

"Ray 'em off," Barr answered. He heard the thrummm of the ray beams as she went into action.

"Get 'em Charlie!" he was yelling at the top of his voice. "Give 'em hell!" Years of suppressed hate were in that yell. All his life the Uighurs had been enemies. They had killed and enslaved his people, they had driven him and his kind underground, they had ruined a world. Now, in some slight measure at least, was the hour of vengeance.

Like a giant smashing a collection of doll houses, the robot hurled vessels into the Uighur encampment. Barracks, laboratories, furnaces, the battleship that was being rebuilt, felt the shattering blows.

Below him on the beach, Barr suddenly glimpsed a Uighur that he recognized. Nogo!

"Get this one for me, Charlie!" he said grimly. "No, don't throw a ship at him. Get him like this!"

THE gigantic mechanism moved sluggishly forward. Too late, Nogo sensed its intention. Nogo still had no clear idea of what was happening. He still thought the robot had gone mad. But mad or not, he perceived what it was trying to do.

He tried to run. It came after him. He screamed and tried to run faster. It followed him. He looked back. It was coming closer. It was almost upon him. He screamed again, looking over his shoulder, and tried to dodge to one side.

He slipped and fell.

Delicately the robot put one ponderous foot on his squirming form, brought its weight down. Nogo's screams went into sudden silence. Hundreds of tons of weight were pressing him into the ground. The foot pressed and pressed and pressed.

Barr sent the mighty mechanism back and forth through the Uighur encampment. Everything that tried to run, it stepped on. Frantic Uighurs tried to man their weapons, tried to bring anti-aircraft beams into action. They

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might have succeeded. At the edges of the camp Barr saw why they would fail.

The slaves were coming back. They had run. They still did not know what was happening. But they were coming back. They were fighting hand to hand with Uighur gun crews. They were using clubs and axes and crowbars. They were using their teeth and their fingernails. When they overpowerd a gun crew, they took charge of the weapon and turned it on the Uighurs.

They had been slaves. They were tasting the pleasure of revolt.

Barr saw a grim gaunt figure stalking ahead of them. Burke! It was the old flier who had rallied the slaves and brought them back. Now the slaves were exacting payment for the torture they had undergone. And among them and through them and around them, as they fought, a giant of steel stalked, helping them.

"Rita!" Barr shouted huskily. "Girl! Do you realize we've won this fight?"

"We've never won as long as Nogo lives," she answered.

He told her what had happened to Nogo. "We've won!" I tell you. "We've blasted them out of existence.—"

Suddenly his eyes narrowed. Three dots had suddenly appeared in the sky. He saw at a glance that they were rocket ships. His heart leaped at the sight.

"Ships from the Council!" he shouted. "They've come to help us."

An instant later he knew that this was not correct. The Council had no way of knowing what had happened here. They could not have sent ships. But ships were coming!

It could only mean one thing. Too well he remembered what Bruton had planned to do. Bruton had succeeded. He had captured the ships of the Council, and returning to the Uighur encampment, had discovered what was going on.

The three ships were diving at them.

"Ray guns, Rita!" he shouted. "If those ships get to us—"

Too well he knew the power in those speedy fliers. The three ships were diving at them. They were coming fast. like streaks of light. Flashes were leaping from the guns in their noses.

THE ray guns thrummed. One darting flier, struck, lanced upward out of control. The other two kept coming. Barr felt the robot lurch as those deadly beams struck home. Simultaneously the two ships dived at him. Rita's guns struck out again. There was only one ship coming now. She had got the second one. But the third one was upon them.

"Get him, Charlie," Barr whispered, a prayer in his voice. "Get him—"

The ship screamed in a power dive. Bruton, piloting it, had seen what had happened to the Uighur encampment. He had gone berserk. He was going to commit suicide by ramming his flier through the robot.

Ponderously the gigantic arm swung through space. The steel fingers were open. There was a tremendous crash. Bruton never knew what hit him. The steel fingers seized the rocket ship, crushed it, hurled it away.

The robot whistled questioningly. "Did I get him?" it seemed to say. "Did I get him?"

"Charlie," Barr whispered. "You got him." He brought the robot to a halt.

AS HE and Rita went down the ladder on one of the great legs, he could see hundreds of slaves running to greet them. Slaves no longer. Free men now. Their shouting filled the morning.

In the east the sun was above the horizon. It was bright with the promise of a new day that was dawning over America, over the world.

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THE DREAMING TREES

By John W. Jakes

The trees had to be destroyed to make way for industrial expansion on the planet. But Thorson refused to be a party to murder!

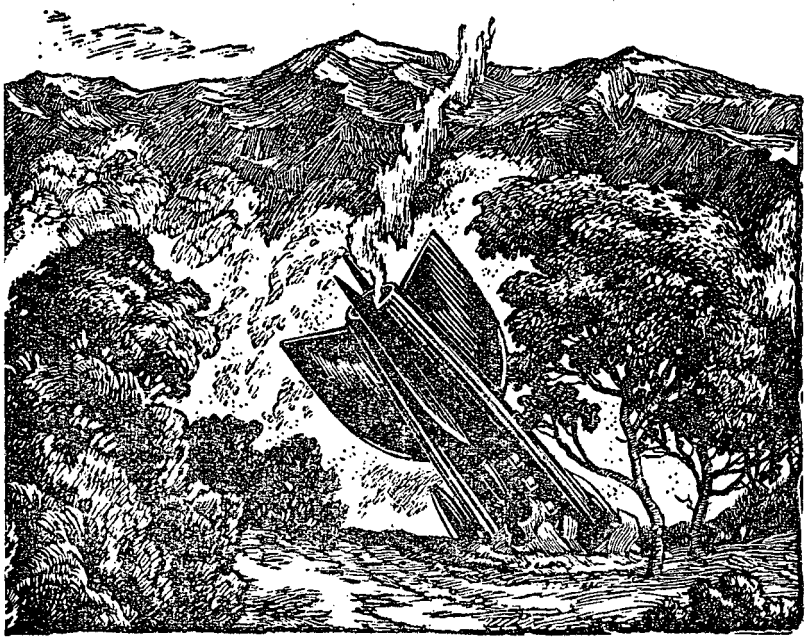
THE HEAVY motor lorry rolled to a stop in the clearing. Overhead a bright blue sun burned down, and from the forest all around came a muted whispering sigh.

Slipping from under the wheel, the blond, copper-skinned man dropped to the ground and assisted the woman in alighting. She felt his arms on her waist, arms that were strong with the mixed bloods of Earth and High Neptune running in them. But she pushed him away as she stepped down, keeping her face hard and unfeeling.

The copper-skinned man shrugged and strode rapidly to a small beryl steel cabin in the center of the clearing. Shoving the door open, he said shortly, "Harrison?"

Mack Harrison came trundling out, a short little man who always should have been smiling. But now he could not even attempt humor.

"Where's the body?" the copper



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man asked questioningly.

Harrison jerked a thumb at the whispering forests. "First clearing, Ben."

Ben Thorsen nodded. "All right. Keep the lorry wave set tuned on the main gate. The crew is getting jumpy." To the woman, he said, "Come with me, Miss Ward."

Alma Ward followed the man called Ben Thorsen away from the cabin, into the forest of towering living trees.

When they stepped out of the blue sunlight into the dim cool of the woods, they entered another universe.

This was the forest of the Dreaming Trees, the only one of its kind in a hundred systems. Ben Thorsen owned the forest, and sold pieces of the wood from the trees, and became a wealthy man. But now he was fighting, fighting an approaching danger.

Alma Ward had been sent from Rocket City by the Ten System Population Council to investigate Thorsen's petition for leniency, which had so far gone unanswered. Walking behind him, the girl realized that she must study the factors carefully, make a wise choice, and not forget to be precise and methodical. Forget about copper arms...and the Dreaming Trees.

The Dreaming Trees were scientific oddities, but marvelously beautiful ones. Reaching some five hundred feet in the air, they had long branches that waved and drooped to the ground like tentacles. But what made them so priceless was their coloring. The trunks, and the very wood of the Dreaming Trees, changed color constantly, swirling from shades of scarlet and yellow to deep blues and greens, every color in the spectrum, and some that could not be classified at all. A small cube of wood, one inch square, from the trees, cost thousands of dollars in the shops of a hundred wealthy worlds.

Thorsen stopped just beyond a second clearing. In the center of the open area, a small Satan Class flier was torn in twisted shapes of wreckage. The torso of a dead breed Martian gaped with sightless eyes from the cockpit.

Thorsen glanced to the trees surrounding the clearing as they modulated from a rich shade of purple into light green.

"It wasn't your fault," he murmured. Then he spoke to the girl.

"Can't you see now, Miss Ward, that the Population Council has to grant my petition? The dead man is from your work crew, isn't he?"

"Yes, sent out to survey the forest."

"His ship must have tangled in the upper branches, and fallen. The trees know what's coming. They know that something is trying to hurt them."

SEATING herself on a part of the wreckage, back to the corpse, the young woman took out a cigarette. High above, the tentacle branches waved in the wind against the blue sun. "You forget, Mr. Thorsen, that the galaxies are opening up. Ship after ship is leaving Sol System every day, bringing families, and the beginnings of industries. There are only a few planets whose atmospheres can support human life. This is one of them. The Ten System Population Council ordered that the surface of every one of these planets be cleared, laid bare as new homes for Earthmen. This is going to be a new Terran world, Mr. Thorsen. All the remnants of the older, primitive way of life must go. However, I still haven't come to a permanent decision on your petition that the trees be spared."

She regretted the remark instantly, from a factual point of view. But from another point of view, the beau-

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ty of the trees, she did not. Idly she wondered which of the two outlooks would finally be strongest. Eventually the time to face the issue would come.

"Look," Thorsen argued doggedly, "the trees are a valuable industry."

"The Council feels that the returns will be greater if they are removed. After all, Mr. Thorsen, you are only one man."

That hurt. "The Dreaming Trees exist nowhere else in the stars as far as we know," Thorsen continued earnestly. "My grandfather discovered this planet in the early days of spatial exploration. My father worked the trees in turn, and now they belong to me.

"The Trees are alive, Miss Ward! I know you find that hard to believe. They manufacture food by plant methods, but they have a nervous system and what amounts to a spinal cord and a brain, of the kind found in higher animals. They think."

"Then how," she asked almost mockingly, "can you cut out pieces of their wood to sell, if they have means of feeling pain?"

He allowed himself a reproving smile. "How can surgeons remove skin from a human and have the human remain relatively comfortable? Quite simply. A local anesthetic injected into the wood, a two foot square block of the trunk removed, and the wound bound up. The tree returns to normal, without feeling pain. The cutting actually facilitates growth. Although now we've suspended cutting activities until...this is over."

"The Council Crew at the gate," she said briskly, "can't wait too much longer. The week I've spent considering the petition has delayed their schedule. They're anxious to finish the forest and move on." Her next words were spoken very slowly. "My decision will have to be made... soon."

"This forest is mine!" Thorsen said harshly. "It's my life and my work. The trees are human, or at least, feeling, sentient beings. You can't kill something like that ruthlessly!"

He paused and inhaled his cigarette, arguments temporarily exhausted. The wind rushed through the sky, and the trees were changing dim shadows, exactly as the valleys of human imagination were changing modulations of limitless patterns of beauty.

Attempting to gain further support to his pleadings, Thorsen took a small black box from his belt, and spoke into it. "Bend down to me."

The supple branches of the trees about the clearing came gently down from mighty heights to touch his copper arms with a soft rustling.

Carefully studying the girl's startled expression, he explained, "Oh yes, the trees have speech. The rustling you hear. This box translates my speech into theirs."

Shaking her head in amazement, the girl wandered over to the cockpit of the wrecked flier and fumbled about, trying to remove her thoughts from the disturbing things she had witnessed. Her hand closed on a partly melted beam pistol.

"Look," she said, extending it barrel first to Thorsen.

THE TREES whipped down, screaming in a shrill sigh. Wrapping long branches around her arm, they seized the gun and threw it, and then began to lash her with their cord-like tips.

"Stop!" Thorsen shouted into the black box. "Return! She is a friend. She meant no hurt!"

Alma got shakily up from the ground. "They...know when someone tries to hurt you?" she whispered, forgetting her precise pose.

"Of course. As I said, Miss Ward,

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these trees are things to love and care for, not just pieces of plant and animal pulp. Can't you see that?"

"I cannot render my decision on emotional grounds," she said, regaining her stiffness.

"Ben!" a voice was shouting. "Ben! For God's sake!"

"That's Harrison!" the copper-skinned man exclaimed. "Let's go!"

They ran back to the beryl shed. Harrison was in the seat of the lorry, bent over the wave set.

"What is it?" Thorsen called as he passed the edge of the clearing.

"The Council crew at the gates just got a message from Rocket City. Things have been delayed too long already. They've got orders to go ahead and remove the forest, petition or no petition."

Thorsen was on the high seat. He pushed the girl to the rear compartment. Harrison slammed the lorry into gear, turned it around and went tearing down the dirt road. Thorsen worked frantically at the wave set.

He could almost see the work crew setting up the Samuelson Potential Energy Release units. He could see the beams silently radiating out, until the trees vanished in a soft puff of smoke and there was only flat broken land remaining.

"Barracks," came a voice from the set. The lorry slewed around a curve.

"This is Thorsen. Get out all the trucks. Load up the men with riot guns. The crew's got orders to go ahead. I'm making for the gates. Follow me when I come by and for God's sake make it fast."

He thumbed the cut switch and dialed again. The set crackled into life.

"The Gates," said an anxious voice. He recognized Jenkins, his efficient and Versatile technologist assistant.

"Thorsen. What's happening?"

"Plenty, Ben. They're setting up the Samuelsons right in front of the main building."

"We're coming. Use your riot guns. Fire over their heads. Keep them from working."

"Jesus, Ben," came the puzzled reply, "we haven't got trained fighters."

"Neither have they. They won't fight back. The crewmen are just doing their job. All I want you to do is keep them from doing it, until we get there. I'll try to work out something."

Again he cut the set and swiveled to the rear compartment. Alma was struggling to keep from bouncing against the iron walls as the lorry lurched along.

REACHING for a thick-barreled riot gun, Thorsen found an idea forming within his mind. A frightening idea, in a way, but much better than using the weapon held in his sweaty hands.

"When we get to the Gates, Miss Ward, go out and talk to the work crew. Stall them for a couple of minutes." His face was stabbed with terrible lines of worry. "You've got to help. Miss Ward, or..."

His hands constricted on the weapon. "...or many men will die."

"I'll keep them busy," she murmured, "for a little while."

Eyes on the road, Thorsen tested the riot gun charges. Sweat trickled down under his arms, fanned cold by the wind rushing over the open seat. "Make speed!" he yelled to Harrison.

The little man grimaced and watched the velocity dial. Seventy. Tramping on the floor pedal, he saw the needle creep up...and up...and up....

They roared by the barracks and four trucks loaded with armed men swung into line behind them. Two more miles to the gates.

Two miles for Thorsen to watch

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the trees, changing their beautiful coloring calmly, whispering their tentacle branches against the sky. The pain that would come if the Council crew did their ordered job... he blotted out the thought.

The lorry ground to a stop behind a large gray building. Beyond it echoed the flat slap-slap of occasional power charges.

Thorsen leaped down, holding his riot gun at ready, and kicked open the rear door of the building. He was through in a moment, up the stairs at the side of the great entrance doors, to the balcony where six of his men were crouching.

Beyond the railing Thorsen glimpsed the fifty-odd crew men hidden behind rocks. The truck beds carrying the half-assembled Samuelson Releases were abandoned.

Jenkins, an angular man with thinning brown hair, stooped shoulders and quick brown eyes, hurried over from the rail. Thorsen ordered the men to cease firing as the recruits from the barracks fanned out, weapons nuzzling over the edge of the balcony.

Alma Ward was outside the building, talking to the crewmen who had gathered in a small knot behind one large boulder.

"My God," Jenkins said, scratching his always unshaven face, "I'm damned glad you got here. We're no gunmen."

Thorsen gestured him silent. "Jenk, I know you've done about everything along tech lines, but I want information on three things."

"Let's hear them," the tall man said, even as he carefully observed the woman still talking to the clearing crew.

"Can you put up a force field over the forest? One that can't be broken by any weapon, and controlled by one machine, inside the field?"

"I think so, but why..."

"Never mind that. Can you rig an Air Refurnisher big enough to keep the air inside the force field pure for...any length of time? Even in an area as big as the forest?"

Jenkins chuckled. "Sure."

"And how much material have we got for food production?"

"Hell," Jenkins laughed, "with the new hydroponic trays and packaged compounds, used sparingly, enough for maybe two hundred years."

"That's long enough, I think," Thorsen said with veiled irony. "When can you have all the stuff rigged?"

The stoop-shouldered man thought for a bit. "Maybe by tomorrow morning."

"Early?"

"Yep, should be able to do it."

"Get the men to work right away."

"How're you going to keep the Council boys from doing their stuff?"

Thorsen was already down the stairs as he called back, "That's Miss Ward's job."

He motioned her over to the building from the group of workmen.

"It wasn't hard," she smiled, "with your guns poking at them."

HE TOOK hold of her arms roughly, and his eyes bored deep into her, sincere and hard. "Miss Ward. I need until tomorrow morning. I'm going to try saving the trees. No one will get hurt. But I need until tomorrow morning. Can you keep them from their work that long?"

Alma Ward realized that now she must decide. She felt the rush of devotion to the Dreaming Trees that poured from Ben Thorsen. And beside it, in the uncompromising light of the blue sun, her own methodical consideration and the methodical ravaging on the part of the Council

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seemed, in this case, utterly wrong.

Beyond the man, the trees made sibilant talk and moved their branches and flowed with infinite coloration.

"I'll try," she said, knowing that she did it more for Thorsen than for the trees.

In turn, he felt that he was compelled to be honest with her. No trickery would ever be satisfactory. The victory, if it came at all, had to be honestly won.

"If I succeed, Miss Ward, you won't have to worry about the petition."

Without a word she returned to the crew outside the gates. There was a brief conference, and she was back.

Thorsen waited eagerly, and when her reply came, it was like a cool and peaceful breath of wind. "They'll hold off till morning. I've got some authority with the Council, and an officer here is a bit more powerful than one in Rocket City. They don't really care if they do the job or not...."

He wasn't listening to the last. "Go back to them, and stay till dawn."

He vanished inside the gray building.

In the dirt-floored chamber within the entrance gates, Thorsen was gathering his men.

"We're going to be working hard all night," he said loudly. "Jenkins is in charge. Do what ever he tells you. Tonight you work for him. Let's get started."

Jenkins began bawling orders to the men, remarkably energetic orders from one so apparently quiet.

"...and tell the cook to make ten gallons of coffee!" Jenkins finished.

"What do you want me to do?" Thorsen said.

DAWN CAME like an icy blue eye slowly opening. As the sun crept over the northern horizon, Thorsen drained his final cup of coffee. The night of frantic work was done.

On one part of the dirt floor stood the force field generator, large red handle elevated to the Off position. In another section of the building, the Air Refurnisher waited in metallic silence, wired to begin functioning the moment the force field was erected. Behind the gray building were piled bales of hydroponic compounds.

Thorsen's men, Jenkins included, sat on the floor, smoking, drinking coffee, and telling dirty jokes. But there was not much laughter. Even the jovial Harrison's grin was sickly. They had all seen something in Thorsen's face that told them not to laugh.

The copper-skinned man observed Alma Ward hurrying toward the gates. The work crew was up, finished with breakfast and preparing to work with the Samuelsons. Only a little while remained.

Thorsen asked for quiet. The noise stopped.

"You know," Thorsen explained, "what the Council is trying to do in regard to the Trees. I'm going to prevent that, if I can. I have to let you men go. You've all been fine workers, and Jenkins will give you two months' advance pay until you get settled." He indicated where the angular man sat propped against a large blue cloth bag.

"He'll pay you, and you can hitch the shuttle jet back to Rocket City. I haven't got a lot of time for speech-making." Rapidly, he outlined his plan.

They just sat there, scuffing their shoes and making little whorls of dust. Coffee slosh-sloshed in their cups. For in their own way, they had grown to love the trees. The trees were more than a job, more than a way to make money.

Alma appeared inside the gates, and Thorsen drew her aside. They

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stepped into an adjacent room that still bore marks of the previous night, in scattered pieces of equipment and a large urn full of dark brown coffee grounds.

Thorsen explained his course of action. When he finished, her face held a stunned expression.

"You'd do that?" she whispered.

"Yes, I would. The trees deserve life."

"But can you be sure?"

"I know the Council will reverse its decision," he said, adding in what seemed a hollow and wind-echoing voice, "sometime."

She kept her hand tightly clenched on the edge of the coffee urn, and spoke with deliberation, as if her thoughts were confused and slow in coming.

"I won't cause trouble, because I think...I think you're right. It's rather mixed up, I'm afraid. I can't feel the same affection for the trees that you do, but I think that affection is...right and proper."

He touched her hand cautiously. "You could learn to love them, Alma, in time."

He hoped terribly that she would stay, but a great part of him had already resigned itself to the fact that she would not.

Her dark hair undulated gently as she shook her head.

"I can't. I love the worlds of space, and not the trees." Sorrow edged faintly into her tone.

"We'd better go," he said with forced sternness.

As he was moving to the door she put her hand on his face and he turned. She kissed him.

She didn't cry as she pulled away, but the sorrow came rushing up in her voice. "I love you, Ben, but I love the worlds of space, and not the trees..."

HE EASED the door open, observing the Council workers beyond the gates. They were climbing into the truck beds, approaching the Samuelsons.

"All right," he said to the men, "move."

In a body, they rose and walked briskly through the gates, not looking back. Alma followed.

Thorsen wished he could have slapped their backs and shook their hands and said goodbye to them all, one by one, but time was running out.

Jenkins, walking away, seemed more stooped than ever as he carried the blue bag full of money. Harrison's humor was gone. Alma's steps now were funeral slow.

The Council crew was gaping at the exodus, puzzled. Thorsen moved to the generator. His hand halted for a moment on the lever. Call Alma, he thought wildly, call her, tell her you'll go with her.

But he remembered the trees, much more important than all the worlds of space.

He yanked the red lever all the way down.

Beyond the gates there was a rippling hiss and a transparent curtain of force rose and covered the Dreaming Trees like an inverted bowl.

Ben Thorsen was alone.

The clearing crew realized what had happened. They turned on the Samuelsons, but the wall did not waver. They rushed forward with the frenzy of men fighting for their jobs and their livelihood, beating futilely on the invisible wall. They even tried ramming a truck against it. When the headlights cracked into star patterns of white crystal, they stopped trying.

Nothing could break the force field, no bombs or fission rays or mammoth pressors, until Ben Thorsen lifted the red lever. And he would not lift it until the people of the unfolding star

(continued on page 131)

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SANCTUARY

by CHARLES RECOUR

He saw the world become a crumbling ruin about him, and man reduced to a slave existence. Could he still fight on — alone?

I'M GOING to get caught.

The thought slithered up out of his subconscious and intruded into his mind. *I'm going to get caught. They'll* find out eventually. *They'll* know that you've skipped the Pleasure Time. *They'll* know where you've been going. *They'll* know all about you. You won't be able to escape.

Despair wrapped him like an icy hand. Wurk-Man Smith shuddered. He shook his head vigorously. The ominous shadow of coming events vanished and he came back to consciousness—and the present.

"Are you ill, Wurk-Man Smith?"

Nervously he turned and met the unctuous gaze of Fore-Man Georg. The pig-like eyes, set close together and wrapped in the puffy fatted face stared back solicitously at him.

"No Fore-Man," he answered. "I'm all right. I'm perfect, Sir. It's just that I—I—I..." His voice trailed off.

"If you're really not feeling well, I'll put another Wurk-Man on your machine and send you to the Dispensary," Fore-Man Georg assured him in measured considerate tones.

"There's nothing the matter, Sir," Smith answered humbly and for an instant his eyes rested on the omnipresent paratube hanging at the belt of the Fore-Man.

"Fine. Watch your machine now. We don't want anything to happen you know. The War is most important. Whenever you feel badly just look at the sign—and then think of the Pleasure Time. You'll be all right then."

The Fore-Man nodded encouragingly and continued his walk between the long rows of machines. He radiated an air of supernal kindliness.

But Smith wasn't fooled. He knew that in back of that friendly manner rested a merciless, heartless, coldness, which would make the Fore-Man send him to the Punishment Chambers as easily as he'd look at him.

Smith looked up at the banner which spread across the room. "Wurk Will Win the War," it said in gigantic letters, "And the Wurk-Men and

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the Fore-Men Will do the Wurk." The idiotic statement mocked him at every glance.

Briefly his eyes swept over the vast room in which he had spent most of his adult life. It was a lifeless concrete shell despite the noise and activity within it. Row upon endless row of machines, small and large, milling machines, radial drills, presses, engine lathes and automatic turret lathes—like the one before him—clanked and wrought their desire on the resisting metals fed to them.

Before each machine stood his counter part. Smith saw himself multiplied a thousand times. Pale skinny men and women, sexless and cold, all wearing the colorless grey coveralls of the Wurk-Man, tended their machines, made their adjustments, fed in their parts and removed the finished products. These they placed on the conveyor belts which carried them to the Assembly Room, to be manufactured into parts for some lethal weapon, perhaps, a rocket-bomb, perhaps an anti-rocket gun. Smith didn't know and didn't care.

He stiffened suddenly and jumped forward, but he was too late to prevent the tool from breaking. His left hand stabbed the shut-off button and the lathe ground to a shuddering stop.

HIS HANDS worked furiously and in a moment he had replaced the broken tool bit with a fresh one. Even as his hands automatically swung the spanner he was cursing himself. He should have seen the break coming.

He allowed himself to glance over his shoulder. Fore-Man Georg had turned around a hundred meters down the aisle. He was watching Smith. Smith waited for the Fore-Man's approach. But he didn't come. Instead, he saw the Fore-Man slowly shake his head from side to side.

From then on Smith forced himself to stop thinking. He watched with total absorption, the operations of the turret lathe. Like some inanimate monster it devoured the bars of nickel steel he poured into its head, and like a sick animal it disgorged its finished parts. Endlessly the process went on.

As much as Smith forced himself to concentrate on his charge the snaky inevitable thought insisted on intruding. It will never end. This will go on tomorrow and the day after and the day after that—unto the end of time. And you, Wurk-Man Smith, will stand in front of this machine and continue to make these parts until you become unable to see what you are doing and then *they'll* come and take you to the Aneasthesia Rooms and you'll disappear. And somebody will be assigned to your job until he too weakens. And this will go on and on and on.

It will be the same for a million times a million Smiths. That is what you were born to and that is what you'll serve. The City-State of Illine is your master and the Fore-Men are your guides. Be grateful that they allow you to serve them. Isn't that what you learned in the training time?

You musn't think about the Wurk-Man in Calline or the other City-States of Yorken, or Detrole, or Texanne, or even of the Wurk-Men in the enemy City-States.

Just wait until this shift is finished. Then you can go to the Commune barracks and eat a warm meal. And when your belly is full you can go to the Pleasure Place and vanish into the heaven of drug-induced dreams. Isn't that enough of a life? Just think, how delightful those dream sessions are. You don't see any other Wurk-Men who try to avoid the dreaming. They like it. Why don't you?

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Must you be different? Are you happy because you're different? You know you aren't. You're in agony and misery because you won't step into the pleasure places where all your troubles vanish. Instead you have to think and sneak into the forbidden tunnels.

The subconscious reveries went on all the while Smith attended to his machine. No other accidents happened though he knew he would hear about the broken tool.

The whistle shrilled, doors opened and a swarm of other Wurk-Men descended on the machines. As soon as his relief appeared, Smith walked toward the exit.

The weight of the day was gone and the next few hours were his. As he walked he felt the first relief of the day. He knew what was causing it and he knew he wasn't going to the Pleasure Place tonight just as he hadn't for the last thirty-five days. He knew it with a certainty. He knew he was going to get caught before long too, because his absence had been commented on by the Communal Barracks leader a number of times. The issue hadn't been made, but it was in the making. There was a craving within him for the thing he was going to do, a craving and desire which he couldn't understand at all. It had been said that before the dream-drugs had been invented, men craved drugs. Well, if that was so, he craved the new drug he had discovered.

WURK-MAN SMITH had almost reached the exit. The greater part of the milling crowd had gone; pathetic in the hopeless drabness they were hurrying toward their Communal Barracks—and thence to the Pleasure Places for their brief hour of delight.

"Wurk-Man Smith," a soft voice said at his elbow. He jerked at the words. Smooth and oily, the fat, grimacing face of Fore-Man Georg smiled at him.

"I'm going to have you examined tomorrow," the voice said blandly, "I think you *are* ill. And we can't have that, can we?" He patted Smith on the shoulder. "The City-State requires strong workers. We must win the War, musn't we?"

"Yes. Of course. Yes. But I—I—"

"Now don't you worry a bit, Wurk-Man Smith. We must guard our Wurk-Men's health. We'll have you fixed in a jiffy." He gave Smith another encouraging pat on the shoulder and strode away.

For an instant, an overpowering urge to smash his fat grinning face seized Smith. As the adrenalin worked on him, he felt such power as he hadn't imagined. Then as the Fore-Man disappeared, so did Smith's flare of anger. Futility heaped on futility!

Smith walked slowly to the Communal Barracks. Before he went to the eating rooms, he took a shower and luxuriated in the short sense of comfort afforded by discarding even for a moment, the harsh coarseness of the grey cloth uniform.

He ate a hasty tasteless meal, spooning the food into his mouth and gulping the milky fluid. All around him the animated chatter went on.

"Last night was wonderful. The Pleasure Place sent me into..."

"Yes, Fore-Man Greer said that I was the best Wurk-Man in the shop and he'd try to see if I could get promoted to..."

"Four times, Lanson broke the drill and do you know what they did about it?..."

"The news said a bomb hit the edge of the City-State of Brasilton—the destruction was wonderful..."

"I saw a Rocket-bomb hit last

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night by the Q-4 battery. They exploded it at thirty thousand meters. Isn't that wonderful?..."

"They'll never put a bomb in the center of Illine. Carton said he spoke with an Upper Fore-Man and he said that the Battery at A-11 had absolutely perfect accuracy..."

"The City-State of Moscone actually tried to land Wurk-Men—armed of course—in Detrole. Wasn't that ridiculous? They stopped that sort of thing twenty years ago. Detrole's Wurk-Men shot up the whole bunch with a blanket parabomb. Froze the whole gang stiff. They'll be executed tonight. The Pleasure Place will run a reel off before Dream time. That'll be fun..."

The voices around him were always the same. The victories and defeats. The bombs sent and the bombs which landed. The latest pleasures and the latest dreams. The quotas of work. The failures to meet the quotas and the grand rewards of exceeding them.

Again the urge came to Smith to fling his arms around and shout "you deluded fools—you poor deluded fools. Where are you going? Why don't you die and stop this nonsense. *I* could tell what life is all about—but you wouldn't understand!"

But he said nothing. He ignored the glances of the Wurk-Men who sensed his being different. He finished the tasteless food and left the crowded hall.

HE WAS conscious of the cool night air washing through the porous cloth that covered his body. And as it always did, the fear and anxiety which blanketed him during the day, vanished. The streets were empty save for an occasional person rushing to the Pleasure Places, desirous of not missing its share of film or music or dreaming.

Smith quickened his step. It would not do to appear as a loiterer. A patrol of Fore-Men might pick him up for questioning. Why aren't you in a pleasure place they would ask. And he would be unable to excuse his actions and they would take him and he would disappear. Though the thought seemed less horrible than before. He knew that tomorrow he was going to receive a thorough going-over—and very likely end up in Aneasthesia. The potential threat seemed remote. His mind didn't dwell on it. For the next few hours he was going to have the feel of being a man—not a Wurk-Man—but a simple ordinary man with an insatiable thirst for *knowing*, a thirst which was going to receive more quenching as it had been for the last many days—or nights.

The City-State was impressive. Except for the gaping flat areas he passed occasionally it consisted of vast groups of huge buildings housing Wurk-Men's Barracks, Pleasure Places, Shops and Factories and a few administrative buildings.

Here and there were monuments, usually on the site of a former building which had been hit by a bomb. Invariably the signs before the symbolic statues of stylized Wurk-Men or Fore-Men said: "Here on eleven, third month—of the seventy-second year of the City-State of Illine, a rocket bomb from Berline, destroyed three thousand brave Wurk-Men and a fuze manufactury. This criminal deed was avenged seven days later. Behold the site of the tragedy and remember it!"

Always the same trite phrases. And he knew that the identical sort of thing was done elsewhere—by the enemy too.

He passed an anti-rocket battery. It was a tall domed structure of steel re-inforced concrete from whose roof protruded a dozen tubes capable of

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erupting into furious discharges of anit-rocket projectiles. He could hear the hum of machinery within the building and the numerous radar antennae which studded the sides and roof repeated their endless rotations as they scanned the sky for orders.

The plan of the City-State was well known to Smith. These anti-rocket towers skirted the entire living area and they were just part of a vast network of similar devices which the other City-States, the friendly ones, used to relay information of enemy rockets.

Far to the north he saw a pin point of light moving against the stars. Simultaneously the tubes on the anti-rocket building moved, shuddered slightly and abruptly disgorged for hissing projectiles. The Seeker-Rockets vanished into the night at an incredible rate of speed. A minute passed, then five; a little nearer, now, the pin-point of light suddenly erupted into an incandescent flare and the sound of a gigantic clap of thunder smote Smith's ears. The interceptors had done their job.

It was all routine. It happened countless times each night and day and nobody paid any attention to the enemy rockets—except the rare ones which broke through the radar screen and which were not intercepted. Then a few thousand Wurk-Men disappeared in the terrible explosion.

The resultant inquiries weren't pleasant, Smith knew, for the anti-rocket crews who failed to catch the interloper. But life went on as before. If the building struck was of no consequence, or the area destroyed of no particular value, the inevitable plaque was erected. Otherwise the area was reconstructed and things were just as before.

Before he knew it, Smith was approaching his rendezvous. The buildings began to thin out. And finally the abandoned sections of the former city loomed up. The shattered slums, the habitat of a people long forgotten, forgotten by all save Smith. He knew what treasures lay here.

He moved as cautiously as possible knowing that while the likelihood of being picked up by a patrol was small, it was a possibility. He ducked into the shadows of a building the only remnants of which were walls. He crouched down and looked around. There was nothing moving. He was safe.

With the assurance that spoke familiarity, he walked along the drab debris-littered streets toward his goal. He entered the wreck of a building. Its walls were intact though its roof had long since crumpled in. It had been three stories high but the only usable portion was the cellar.

RATS SCURRIED away as Smith approached. He went down the cellar steps and into the darkness of the building. He walked through a door and found himself in the dear familiar room which had created him. He lit an oil lamp which was hanging from the door post and walked to the one battered chair which formed the room's only furnishings. He sat down, hung the lamp from a peg on the wall and inhaled the musty odor of the room exultantly.

His eyes lit first on his treasure trove, the cause and meaning of all his rebellion.

In one corner of the room, resting on two crude wooden shelves were several hundred *books*. Dirty, thumbed, smudged and falling apart, they presented a pathetic spectacle but to Smith's eyes, they were the sum total of the universe.

He got up, breathing heavily as if the emotion of being near the books

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was too much for him. He went slowly over to the shelves and selected a book, then another. He took the two of them back to the rotting chair and sat down. The oil lamp cast just enough light to read by.

There was something sensuous in Smith's movements as he ran his hands over the broken bindings of the books. His breath came rapidly Finally he inhaled deeply and calmed himself. He was about to take a journey in time, a journey which would bring him to a world which until a few months ago he had not known existed.

He opened the first book. "History," it said, "The Second World War To The Formation of the City-States." He shut it.

The Second book was much thinner than the first. It read, "The City-States And the Perpetual War."

And then Smith followed his nightly ritual of reading. This abandoned library had furnished him with a reference point for thinking. Until that magnificent night when he had stumbled upon the place while seeking shelter from a particularly bad blast of bombs, he found himself in this haven. Since then, this was his life—and maybe his death.

The books had acquainted him with the whole course of human history, from the dawn of man until the creation of the Super-State in which man functioned as a cog, a sliver, in the gigantic machine.

It was here that Smith learned of the existence of the governing class of Upper Fore-Men who ruled the city-states and made war upon each other simply as a means of existing, not as an end in itself. War gave the City-States their economic reason for being.

Avidly Wurk-Man Smith continued his reading. To him a new vista was being disclosed, a vista which hitherto has been inconceivable. The title "Wurk-Man" and "Fore-Man" were clear to him now. Every inhabitant of a City-State was one or the other —but the gulf between them was large especially in the case of the "Upper Fore-Man." And he knew their function now—as parasites on a soulless existence.

Frequently he interrupted his reading to retrace his steps to the doorway of the building which he now occupied in order to assure himself that no light was visible and that no prowling patrols of Fore-Men were about. It was hard to do this because he became so lost in his reading that he forgot about the amenities.

Suddenly a shrill whistle blast split the air. In one motion, Smith doused the oil lamp and scuttled through the doorway of the room to the exit of the building along its side.

With skill borne of practice he stepped over and around the piles of rubble until he reached the concealment of a low wall. Here he crouched almost next to the street, safe from detection by the very obviousness of his haven.

A minute later he heard the clumping feet of the patrol. He peered through a crack in the brick wall and tried to make out the figures in the darkness. There were half a dozen men, some wearing the brassards of the Security Police, the others the simple insignia of the Anti-rockets units. The rocket men were armed with rifles. The Security Police held their deadly little paratubes before them.

Smith heard the senior officer shout: "It's no use. We'll stumble around here forever. I'll send in a patrol in the morning. They'll pick her up." With that the patrol reformed and Smith saw it moving off.

Cautiously he waited until the retreating footsteps could no longer be

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heard. *Her?* He was puzzled. It was so rare for a Wurk-Man to try and leave the city-state that the thought was difficult to digest. If she was being sought by the police, what could it have been for?

SMITH WAITED for another ten minutes. He neither saw nor heard anything. Finally he got up from his cramped position and returned to his secret shelter where the books were concealed.

He stepped through the familiar doorway into the blankness of the room. He reached out to relight the oil lamp.

Something slid around his throat, and a sharp point prodded him in the back.

"Don't move," a voice whispered, "don't move or I'll kill you." Smith stood stock-still. He breathed tremulously through parted lips. He said nothing. He behaved exactly as a citizen of the City-State of Illine.

Violence, in the sense of dread from bombs and enemy raiders was a common experience, but it was remote and impersonal withall, for City-State inhabitants knew it as something from without. In all his life Smith had never seen a human being angry with another. The Illines were completely composed whatever their destiny. All fire and force had been bred out of them. And Smith was no different. His seeking sanctuary here on the edge of the city did not mean that his rebellion was born of real hatred and anger of the type that would produce physical violence. He might think of it; he might hate momentarily, but he would never raise a hand to the authorities not even to Fore-Man Greer.

He didn't know what to make of his assailant.

She spoke again: "I'm going to let you light your oil lamp," she said in low tones, "but if you so much as move near me, I'll cut you faster than Aneasthesia can do it. Do you understand?"

Smith nodded. "I understand," he managed to croak out through parched lips.

He lit the oil lamp and turned to face his attacker, the refugee. He was startled by what he saw. The woman who confronted him was exactly like the thousands of machine workers. But there was a distinction. Her eyes shone in the dark. An aura of incredible power emanated from them as if she was accustomed to having her will.

She wore the sexless coveralls of the Wurk-Men. Her hair was clipped short and despite the pallor of her skin, Smith could sense the innate attractiveness of her—so different from the psuedo-sexual desire of the Pleasure Palaces and the Dream Rooms.

She was just a little shorter than he. Her face and clothes were dirty and she stood with a slight crouch like a cat ready to spring. Above all Smith saw the needle-bladed knife glittering in her hand. He recognized it at once. It had been ground from an old file into a stilletto.

The girl ran a hand through her grimy hair. She looked tired and hurt under the shell of anger she supported.

"I know you," she said slowly, "and if you behave I won't have to kill you."

Smith shook his head. The alien experience was beginning to excite him. "I'm not your enemy," he said, "I won't hurt you."

She laughed bitterly: "Of course you won't."

"I didn't mean that. I'm in trouble too." Smith was amazed that he should utter the unguarded syllables, before this stranger.

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"All right—you've seen me now. Douse the lamp."

Smith obeyed. He found himself admiring the commanding manner she possessed. No Wurk-Man, man or woman owned an attitude like hers. He found an exhilaration in the newness.

She sat down in the chair.

"Sit on the floor," she ordered. Smith obeyed. "I know you won't betray me for a while," she went on, "because I've been watching for five nights. I came here right after you left each time. I've been reading too."

"How did it happen that you were being chased by the Security Police?" Smith asked, relieved that he had nothing but conversation to worry about. At first he had feared her hostility.

"My name is Stella," the girl said. "You must have heard the commotion five days ago when I struck Fore-Man Stang."

"I didn't," Smith said and he was thinking, *I* was too occupied with my own problem to even know what was going on.

"Well, I did it," the girl reiterated, "and they sent me to Anaesthesia. I broke away and I've been hiding ever since living on anything I can get hold of."

THEN THE smouldering fire of rebellion that had just nudged Smith in the past, broke into a burst of furious activity. For the second time in less than a few weeks he had a striking thought. His whole scale of values was changing so rapidly. The jelly-fish existence of a Wurk-Man held no appeal whatsoever. His intellectual processes were fermenting.

"Stella," he said quietly, "I want to escape with you. I'll help. Together we might be able to get away."

The girl drew back alarmed as he could tell by her sudden intake of breath and the rustling of her coveralls.

"What do you mean?" she demanded sharply.

And then Smith told her. He told her of his altercation with the Fore-Man. He told her what had happened inside him when he discovered what life was all about. The little library had tipped his entire world over and made it impossible for him to be a slave to the drab futile existence he was undergoing.

Stella listened through the entire speech which assumed, after a time, the proportions of a tirade. And she sympathized completely.

The next hour's conversation lifted the two tiny gears in the vast war-machine that was Illine, the City-State, into a state of near ecstasy. As yet they had only begun to realize their potentialities as humans.

"We'll have to stop talking Stella," Smith said. "It's getting late and if we're going to leave here at all, we'd better go now. It won't be too long before they'll have the patrols out and they'll find this place for certain." Even as he said the words he felt a strange burst of pride that he should be making such an original proposal and he couldn't understand the brief burst of pride that knifed through him when Stella acquiesced so readily, almost as if *he* were the rebel the patrol was searching for instead of her.

There was nothing to take with them. Stella had her knife. Smith had nothing but his skinny bare hands. But alone among the inhabitants of Illine, they possessed the priceless ingredient—courage.

Stella preceded Smith through the doorway. He took a last lingering glance at the darkness which sheltered the source of his knowledge, the pitifully beaten books. They had been the key. He wondered if

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Stella felt the same and he almost asked her. But something held him back. There was still a measure of reserve. The City-State had never encouraged social intercourse in any form other than interest in the progress of the inevitable war.

They walked through the darkness hugging the walls and pavements of the ruined section of the city, taking the direction which Stella assured Smith was the one way out. They made no sound except occasionally to whisper to each other. They walked carefully picking their way amidst the shattered remnants of buildings.

Once in a while they would accidentally touch each other, and the feel of Stella's hand did something to Smith, a something which he understood only vaguely.

Now and then they would hear the sound of a careless confident patrol making its rounds. When that happened they would immediately drop to the ground seeking to blend with the rubble. They would wait until the patrol passed and then resume their progress. Patrols were infrequent and not at all watchful. For what was there to watch? The enemy rarely ever attempted a suicide mission. And runaway rebellious Wurk-Men were unheard of—until now.

Probably by tomorrow Smith thought fearfully and excitedly at the same time, the city-state would be combed from top to bottom in an effort to unearth them. Such a thing as refugees was unheard of, completely unheard of.

THE BUILDINGS began to thin out considerably, a certain indication the edge of the city was being reached. They both became more alert. It was now that the possibility of running into trouble was greatest. In addition they could see one last anti-rocket tower looming up in the distance. They would have to be extremely careful now.

They had to leave the city before dawn broke or they'd be sure to be spotted by helicopter crews. Once outside the city there'd be a chance to get into woods somewhere or into a rocket crater amidst the pock-marked and pitted land. There they might stand a chance.

In the darkness, Smith thrilled suddenly to the touch of Stella's hand on his shoulder. He stopped as the pressure increased. The girl put her lips to his ear.

"Look!" she whispered, "over there." Her hand pointed. In the darkness it was hard for Smith to make out the figure toward which she was pointing. His eyes had spent too much time gazing at a rotating machine. Finally he caught the sight.

A few hundred feet away, planted right squarely in the middle of the pitted street littered with the fragments of bomb broken houses, stood a patrolman. Smith couldn't make out whether he was a rocket man or not.

"We can't get by him," she said softly. And she looked into his eyes. Then she held up her stilletto. "I've got to do it, Smith," she said. "Otherwise, he'll report us. We can't possibly lie out of it."

Smith looked at her for a moment. He gazed into her clear eyes. Something passed through him, a feeling of revulsion and triumph for what he was about to do.

He put his fingers to his lips signifying silence. Then he reached out and gently disengaged the blade from Stella's hand. Reluctant at first, she released it. Then she saw the light in his eyes and she smiled. Smith took the blade.

"Talk to him," he said grimly, "and I'll come up behind him."

Stella walked away immediately.

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She got within twenty feet of the soldier before she was halted.

"Who's there?" he called loudly. "Come forward and be recognized!"

"I'm lost," Stella called out. "I don't know where I am."

The guard hearing a woman's voice feared nothing, though he would not have feared a Wurk-Man either. He held his paratube in his right hand loosely. Mentally he was welcoming the opportunity to talk with somebody. It would be three hours yet before the 'copter would come to pick him up and this outpost was lonely.

When he saw Stella approaching he felt remarkably glad. This was going to be a pleasant tour of duty.

"What happened?" he asked jovially, "too much time in the Dream Rooms?" He chuckled at his own humor. "Everyone gets dizzy now and then. But how did you get out here?"

Stella approached close to him. She shrugged. "I don't know," she said. "It just happened. One minute I was leaving the Dream Rooms at the North Pleasure Palace and a half hour ago I found myself here. What do I do now?"

"Just wait here with me for..." The next words were choked in his throat. Smith's arm lashed around the guard's neck effectively preventing any outcry though this wasn't really necessary. At the same instant the guard's body stiffened and then convulsed violently as Smith's right hand drove the crude home made dagger into his back.

Smith stepped back. His face was white and he was trembling. He had not only used violence—he had killed a man! Now the course was irrevocable. The girl looked at him with understanding. She stepped up to him and seized his vibrating hand in hers. The stilletto fell from nerveless fingers.

"I know," Stella said compassionately. "It is a terrible feeling. But it had to be done."

"I feel so strange," Smith said in a trance-like voice, "I—I—"

He stopped abruptly. The enormity of his crime, the running from the City-State, the hours with the books, the meeting with the girl—all flashed through his mind. He braced himself. He was committed.

He shook his head. Then he bent down and picked up the bloody instrument. He wiped it on the guard's clothing and put it in his pocket. He moved calmly, the initial horror disappated.

"Come," he said shortly, "It'll be dawn before long. We must get away from here." Obediently, Stella followed him. Neither glanced a second time at the guard's body.

THE NEXT TWO hours were a nightmare of hurry and indecision. Finally they were well away from the city and deep into the wooded surrounding sections. At least they were invisible for the most part from the air, though some snooping helicopter could detect them if it flew low enough.

"Stella," Smith said as he and the girl crouched in a vast hole that had been made by a rocket bomb and which was now a mass of thicket, "they'll spare no pains to hunt us down. They'll know we killed the guard. We've violated the code and we'll be chased."

Stella shrugged. There was no despair on her face. While they were but a minute's flight from the city by air, they still had a fighting chance.

"Smith," she said, looking at him quizzically in the early morning glow that preceded daybreak, "are you sorry it all happened?"

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Up until this moment, Smith's normally pale face had been almost blue as from an inward terror. Then as the girl asked the question everything seemed to fall into place. This did make sense. The confusion wasn't there. He had to learn to think like a free man not like a Wurk-Man. Somehow he would manage to live—maybe even Stella would stay with him—maybe even...

He looked up at her and there was pride in his sunken eyes. "I'm glad it happened," he said intensely. "I'm glad. I'm glad!" He shook his fist at the direction of the city. "Even if we have to die!"

"No," Stella said, "We won't think that way at all. Why should we have to die? The City-State isn't everything. For all we know, maybe others have escaped too."

"I never thought of that," Smith said. "I've been thinking we were doing something so very strange. Maybe others thought the same. But we never heard about it."

"Of course not," Stella said, "you don't think the Fore-Men would talk about it and tell us, do you?"

The dawn broke clear and fair. It was early summer and because vision was so clear, it would be impossible for the two to move during the day. They must remain crouched in their shelter. For the time they should be safe.

The time passed slowly and the agonies of thirst and hunger gradually crept up on them. There was no water nor had they any food. Parched and hungry they could only sit miserably and wait for time to pass. The only motion was the swaying of tree limbs under the wind—except for the occasional and distant sight and sound of a rocket bomb being exploded in the air and sneaking through the anti-rocket towers into the city-state.

At first Smith and Stella conversed animatedly but as time wore on thirst and ennui and terror—unspoken but alive—intruded. So through the course of the long day they remained in the thicket watching, dozing fitfully and waiting. Everytime they saw a 'copter overhead their faces blanched, but none descended. Gradually the day passed and the thickening shadows of nightfall brought promise of relief—as well as escape.

As soon as darkness came Smith and Stella left the entanglement of their shelter and resumed their journey to the West. It was imperative that they remain near the road using it as a guide. Their training had provided no woodsmanship. Operating a lathe for a lifetime does not consider outdoor living.

They stayed off the edge of the the road by a hundred feet, preferring discomfort to detection. Unless chance intervened they should stand a good chance of getting away.

"Listen," Stella said suddenly. Smith strained and his ears caught the soft *sluff-sluff* of 'copter blades.

Terror-stricken he gasped out one word: "Run!"

Seizing Stella by the hand Smith ran like one possessed. The two ran along the ditch that bordered the road. There was a soft *whoosh* and the rubber-tired wheel of the 'copter tore the girl from Smith's grasp. She gave an agonized shout as the wheel struck her side and then she collapsed into unconsciousness.

The 'copter landed with a light bounce a few feet away and Smith saw the grinning faces of the guards. One lifted his paratube to ray the rebel.

IN THE short moment of the tragedy Smith felt such anger and hatred course through him as de-

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fied analysis. Without thinking, he moved. As the adrenalin shot through his body, he bent down and in one swift motion picked up a heavy boulder lying on the ground and flung it with terrific force at the guard with the paratube. The jagged rock struck the man in the face, bowling him over the side of the open-seated 'copter.

Smith couldn't think clearly. He only knew that Stella had been struck down. In one instant he vaulted the distance between the 'copter and himself. Like a wild cat he was on the astonished patrolman. Surprised, the man fumbled for his paratube, but his soft muscles reacted too slowly. Smith was no paragon of strength; indeed he was a shadow of a man, but he was infused with such a blood lust that nothing could stand before him.

His hands were around the guard's throat, choking and tearing, his stiletto forgotten in the passion of hate. Furiously he pressed, forcing the man's head against the side of the 'copter seat. For a short while the guard struggled with the desperation of the knowledge of death, but his flurries were of no avail against the momentary superhuman strength of Smith. Finally the man's body went limp.

The only sound in the night was soft hissing of the idling blades overhead. Embittered and confused with grief and anxiety, Smith bent over the girl's body. He put his hand over her heart. Thank God! She was still alive, but she made no sound.

Still consumed with confusion, Smith glanced wildly around. What to do? This was not the time or place for rationalizations. Gently he lifted Stella into the 'copter, flinging the strangled guard's body over the side. The control board and levers of the 'copter were a mystery to him. Yet a certain innate mechanical intelligence guided him. Still dazed he pulled a few levers.

The blades overhead swung into a smoother hiss. To his amazement, Smith found the 'copter rising slowly. Gingerly he toyed with other parts of the controls.

Even though the exhaustion of reaction was setting in, Smith forced himself to experiment. To his surprise he found that little skill was needed to guide the 'copter. Had he thought he might have realized that this was to be expected. He had never encountered any guards with very high intelligence standards.

Seeing that the 'copter would fly itself to all intents and purposes, Smith leaned back a moment to quiet the trembling in his legs and the fluttering of his stomach. He looked at Stella. She was breathing softly. He bent over her. There was an ugly bump on the side of her head and when he opened her coveralls, he could see the nasty bluish bruise that covered her side where the major force of the 'copter wheel had expended itself.

He searched the 'copter's small compartment and found nothing but a small canteen of water. Gratefully he poured some between her lips and was rewarded by the fluttering of her eyelids. Abruptly she sat up, then almost fainted back again as the pain of her bruises touched her consciousness.

Sudden realization of their position struck her. She glanced again at the whirling blades overhead. In sudden alarm, she flung herself against Smith and winced with pain.

"Don't be afraid." Smith mouthed soft words of comfort and held the frightened girl tenderly. His weariness dropped from him. All the terrors they had endured seemed worthwhile. This was the way things

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should be. He found himself caressing the girl's hair. The grime and dirt seemed almost as a badge of honor after sterile cleanliness.

SHORTLY they were capable of coherent thought. Smith resumed control of the 'copter. He had no means of navigation other than the lights of the City-State they had so recently escaped. Shrewdly moving so as to make these lights decrease and finally vanish, Smith knew he was putting a great distance between the source of his horror—and his joy.

The 'copter sped on through the night, a few hundred feet above the ground. Deliberately Smith sought the low altitude to avoid possible spotting by any distant guard though the danger of encountering such a guard by chance was greater. But since they rarely wandered far from the City-State, Smith knew that to all practical intents and purposes they had made good the thing he had feared would never happen—successful escape.

The water went rapidly and both Stella and he were in acute discomfort from hunger and thirst. Stella's bruises burned like fire and Smith's actions had completely enervated him. Like two stolid beasts they crouched in the 'copter letting it carry them away from the City-State, knowing that it would be best not to land any sooner than necessary.

Soon they dozed off into the drowsy fitful sleep of exhaustion.

Smith jerked awake. The 'copter was still moving along at a good clip, the blades hissing overhead, the motor purring smoothly. The three hours of fitfull rest had taken the edge off his fatigue though the hunger and thirst were worse. He looked at Stella. She was breathing deeply and calmly in spite of her hurts. His heart warmed to her. He could feel his despair vanishing at the mere thought that he knew her.

Then out of the darkness came a sound. Smith looked around wildly. Again came the flat *crack*. He spotted the marauders at once. A half mile away and coming at a good clip were the running lights of another 'copter!

Again came the *crack*. The guards were firing at them! Despair washed over Smith, but the appeal of the dozing girl did something to him. Before he might have surrendered at the first sign of pursuit. With her coming, all that was changed. Only one thought obsessed him. He had to escape. He had to.

He seized the controls of the 'coptor and speeded it up. In a burst of speed it started to outdistance the pursuers. The gunfire continued. Twice Smith, terror-stricken and yet cool, the perfect paradox of the mouse turned lion, heard shots spang against the aluminum sides of the 'coptor.

Stella, awakened by the noise and changing motion, looked around. She saw Smith manipulating the controls. She was too sore and stiff and hurt to move much. All she could do was lie there.

Smith glanced at her and saw she was awake. At the same time her face broke into a pain-twisted smile. That was enough. Smith turned his energies to the 'coptor.

He dared not let the 'coptor of the Fore-Men get at all close for then their bad marksmanship wouldn't matter. And there was the short range paratubes to worry about.

The two machines sped through the night, the one a few hundred yards behind the other. Once Smith tried an evasive manuever but he lost so much distance through his clum-

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siness that he dared not try it again. Instead he persisted in the straight race. Once or twice he gained distance. But each time the other matched it.

The gunfire had ceased as if the Fore-Men guards knew that they were bound to take the refugees. They could afford to sweep down on the fleeing pair. They need fear no weapons.

Then that happened which Smith feared most. The engine of the 'coptor began to sputter. It alternately ran smooth and raggedly. He knew it was a matter of minutes before the fuel was gone.

Abruptly the motor stopped. Stella arose to a sitting position. Fear replaced pain in her eyes. Overhead the blades whirled slowly and the 'coptor began to settle gently toward the earth. The pursuing craft sped rapidly toward them as they descended.

Smith crouched with Stella behind the side of the 'coptor, offering no target to the paraguns even at close range. The pursuers would have to board.

Smith's hand clenched convulsively around the haft of the home-made stilletto. "We'll die, Stella," he said his voice vibrant with desperation, but in his heart he knew they'd be caught and taken back to Illine.

"Yes," whispered the girl and there were tears in her eyes. "Kill me now, please!" Smith looked at her with hofror, and pity. The thought hadn't touched his mind. "No!" he said savagely. "We have a chance yet!"

Another time and another place might have inspired him with the same thought, but here and now—never! Stella was his inspiration and she was demanding the impossible.

Then the 'coptor touched the ground and the blades stopped their hissing and remained still. A few seconds later, the Fore-Men were alongside and the leading figure spotted the crouching Smith.

EVEN AS Fore-Man Georg brought up his paratube to freeze and capture the runaways, Smith launched his wiry body in a spring-like leap. He shot forward, stilletto in hand. The mocking look on Georg's face changed for a moment to fear. He pressed the stud on the paratube and Smith's leap carried him in a stiff heap over the edge of the control pit where he hung like a trussed chicken, helpless to move, consciousness and will gone. The numbing shock of the paratube had blanked out another rebel for an hour.

Stella waited for the paralyzing force, helpless to fight.

Georg looked at her and laughed: "You didn't think you could defy the City-State?" he asked; he laughed again. "What fools!" He turned to his two companions. "We'll take them both back," he said. "The Punishment Rooms will want to see them."

He turned away and at the same instant, Stella heard the unmistakable sharp *crack* made by only one weapon. A rifle shot burst out of the darkness. Before the girl's eyes, Georg suddenly stopped his movement. A funny smile spread over his face and Stella saw a round little hole in the man's forehead. Before the astonished guards could move more shots rang out...it was over... Stella blacked out as fatigue and shock overwhelmed her nervous system.

Smith came to slowly and glanced around him. His eyes widened as he saw what was happening.

It seemed like dozens of men, dressed in the ragged well-worn clothing of Wurk-Men were scurry-

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ing around him. He saw the tangled heap of three bodies—the Fore-Men laying in the stiffened attitude of death. The men were working madly he could see now to take the two 'coptors apart. Their wrenches and their tools never ceased moving.

Smith dragged his slowly recovering body to where Stella lay. One of the men was bathing her face with water. Smith looked at his muscular physique, his confident manner and marveled.

"Relax, friend," the man said, "we'll take care of you. The girl'll be all right too. Some Fore-Men hate the City-States too."

The man had a peculiar accent. He must be from another City-State maybe an enemy one, Smith thought. But aren't they all alike? What are they doing trying to revive us.

Then the meaning dawned on him!

"Do you mean," he asked in a desperate whisper, "that you're all free, that you've all run away from the City-States?" Incredulously he waited for the answer.

The man smiled: "Of course," he said, "there are colonies over underground refugees all over the country, and we manage to do pretty well.

"The City-States let us have plenty of equipment and weapons." He gestured toward the sprawled bodies of the Fore-Men. "See what I mean?"

Smith nodded dumbly and a fierce incomprehensible joy spread through him. It had paid to fight, to have courage! He knew where he was going at last—if they'd have him. The sobering thought made him reflect. "Will Stel—the girl and I have a chance to stay with you people?" he asked timidly.

"Ha!" the man snorted, "you've got to. You don't think we'd let loose of two people like you. We hate the Fore-Men, you know. Of course, you'll have to take a thorough check—we don't want any Fore-Men spies with us, but from what we've seen you'll do all right."

Smith nodded gratefully. Stella's eyelids began to flutter. She came to quickly. Smith reached out and took her hand. He put his finger to his lips.

"Don't talk Stella," he said softly, "we're safe now—and forever." His eyes wandered to the side. The 'coptors were a mass of metal parts which the freemen were carrying away. The only sign of the incident was the bodies of the Fore-Men. They wouldn't be there long. Smith saw the large hole being dug.

"We're safe, Stella," he repeated, and his tongue fumbled for the unfamiliar word he once had read, "—we've found a sanctuary..."

THE END

★ OYSTER-CATCHER ★

SOMEBODY always gets a brilliant idea—usually from a simple thing. Consider the latest method of harvesting oysters. Hitherto this has been a tedious bed-sweeping method that has been inefficient. Now a new method is used, one which is so simple as to defy explanation as to its origin.

A gigantic vacuum cleaner is used to sweep the bottom of the shore-line where the beds of oysters lay. The powerful suction hose with a wide nozzle on the end sucks up water and oysters, passes the water through a filter and retains the oysters. It is a huge rubber and steel machine that can drag up a thousand bushels of oysters an hour!

Actually it is using a technique employed by the whale which sweeps through the sea with open mouth, absorbing schools of fish and ejecting the water. That this gigantic vacuum cleaner will be used to trap other creatures of the sea is undeniable. What chance has a fish these days? First they use sonar to track down the fish—then they scoop him up in all-sweeping nets. Now some human wishes to vacuum them. In all the world is there no suitable opponent for Man? —*Pete Bogg*

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UNFORESEEN by Roger P. Graham

The robot knew that as long as life existed his race was in peril — but could *all* living matter be destroyed? . . .

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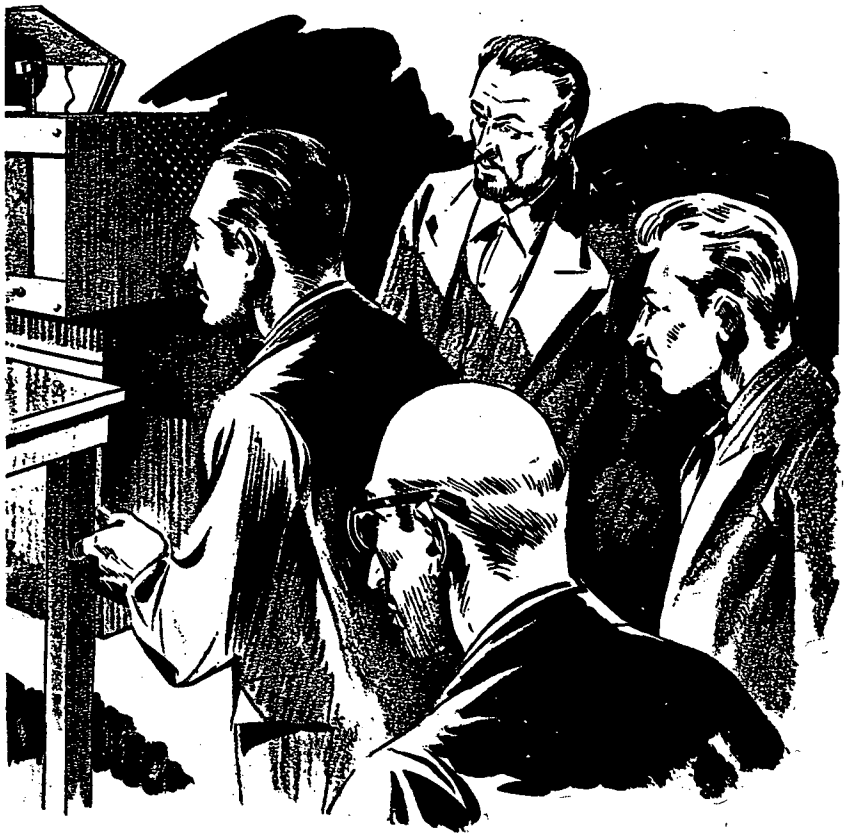
PROFESSOR HORACE. JONES turned his eyes anxiously to the large athletic figure walking with effortless smoothness at his side.

"Are you sure you will be able to function properly, Rob?" he asked doubtfully.

"Of course, professor," Rob replied with a tolerant smile. "Although you created me you have no real conception of the complexity OR the reliability of my mechanism. I assure you that it is far more dependable than yours." The robot glanced pityingly at the tired, stooped shoulders of Professor Jones, the fragile, susceptible organism that was his body, always in need of expensive nourishment.

"I—I guess you're right," Horace Jones said doubtfully. "Maybe my doubts came from the fact that I made you, and I don't have too much confidence in myself or my work."

"You've done very well, Professor,"



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Rob said sincerely. "Your humility is hardly supported by the facts—namely, me." He chuckled throatily, his plastic face responding to the emotion of mirth with a perfect simulation of human good nature.

"This interview will mean a lot to me," Horace Jones said worriedly. "If everything goes right I will be acclaimed the greatest living scientist, as your creator."

"That's right," Rob said gently. "Don't worry so. I won't let you down. As a matter of fact, I'm looking forward to it."

The two turned into the massive portal of the government building. Side by side they walked across the marble floor to the elevator bank. In a few moments they were outside the door of the office they had come so far to enter.

It was Rob who turned the knob and pushed the door open. He held it open for Professor Horace Jones to pass, then followed him in.

Rob saw that the professor's knees were beginning to wobble slightly. He took him by the arm and led him up to the reception desk.

The girl at the desk stopped chewing her gum as she took a good look at Rob. Unconsciously her hand stole up to make sure her hair was in place.

"Professor Horace Jones and his robot experimental model, by appointment," Rob answered the girl's questioning look.

"Go right in, Professor," the girl said, not taking her eyes off Rob. "They're expecting you." She fluttered her eyes daintily and bit coyly on her gum.

ROB and Horace came to a stop just inside the door. Several men were standing about, their eyes staring in puzzled concentration.

"Which one of you is the robot?" one of them asked doubtfully.

"I am," Rob said, smiling. "And this is Professor Horace Jones, the man who created me."

There were several minutes of introductions and conversation. Rob took part with perfect poise, his humor matching that of the wittiest of them, his conduct equal to the most gentlemanly.

Slowly Horace began to feel at ease under this treatment. A sparkle of enjoyment appeared in his eyes. He expanded under the admiring looks of the assembled government scientists as Rob took off his clothing and displayed his robot body, unadorned by flesh and skin-muscle where it was not exposed to view when properly dressed.

After half an hour Rob put his clothes on again. The scientists took seats around the wall, and Horace prepared to make his selling speech.

"Rob, as I call him," he began, glancing affectionately at his creation, "first began about five years ago. During the fifteen years preceding that I had worked on and solved the circuit principle of the human brain, and determined the properties of the component parts of the brain. What I wanted to do was reproduce the human brain in all its functions in non-living matter.

"As you can see, I succeeded. Rob's brain is an almost infinitely complex structure, created by a combination of the process of metal plating and crystalization. The resultant brain functioned on a principle of accumulation of electric charge in microscopic condenser cells. The charging and discharging of these minute condensers produces the mental activity. The details of operation are so complex that there would be no hope of convincing anyone the principle is correct except by the actual presence of such a non-organic brain in good working order,

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in a robot body. Rob is that proof."

One of the government men held up a hand for the floor. Horace nodded and stopped talking.

"As you know, Professor," this man said, "it was found that the hard radiations of space were what killed all living creatures that left our atmosphere. It is well known that these same hard radiations have a property of discharging condensers. How do you know that Rob's brain will not be affected by them out in space?"

Horace, instead of answering, turned and looked knowingly at Rob. Taking his cue, Rob went to a desk and, placing both hands carefully on either side of his head, raised it straight into the air.

As it slid up a smooth cylinder came into sight. The hands lifted the head free and set it on the table. Then the robot body walked about the room casually while Rob's head watched it.

"You see," Horace explained. "With a living person the whole body must be protected by a lead sheathing. With a robot only the brain need be protected. A robot placed in the pilot room of a space ship can leave his head in a place of safety and control his body perfectly without being exposed to radiations. On landing someplace, he can again put his head and body together for leaving the ship."

"We will of course have to conduct intelligence tests and other tests," another voice spoke up. "I believe, though, that you have the answer to the problem of space flight."

"Of course I have," Horace said. "With crews of others like Rob we can man space ships to go to the other planets and come back with details and with specimens."

"But we want MORE than that," another voice spoke up hastily. "We want robots that can carry on complicated surveys, explore for minerals, even build up a robot civilization, since space travel is out for living beings. We can manufacture millions of robots for this."

A more practical voice spoke above the many trying to talk at once.

"Suppose we run Rob through the aptitude and intelligence tests," it suggested.

Rob was led away through a side door while Horace was forced to remain behind. The moment the robot was gone the voices took a different slant.

"Of course," one said dryly. "You have built some sort of control into Rob so that if he turns dangerous he can be easily destroyed, perhaps by a radio signal. They must all be built that way. Otherwise we might eventually face a robot civilization able to destroy us and maintain itself without us."

PANIC bit at Horace's soul. It suddenly struck him that if he told these men the truth they would object very strenuously and insist that Rob be destroyed at once. He knew he would rather die himself than have that happen.

"Oh yes," he said knowingly. "However, that is my secret, at present. You needn't fear. I would not have built such a strong, intelligent robot without controls in case he became hostile. He doesn't know of them, though. I wanted to see how he would develop without knowledge of the fact that I can destroy his mind almost by a thought. So far he has proven very upright and cooperative in everything."

"How long will it take for you to start production on these robots, assuming we find that this one fulfills all requirements and no more experimental work is necessary?" another voice piped up.

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"I already have a hundred well past the critical stage in manufacture," Horace admitted. "They can be completed in a couple of months. After that it will take at least two years to synthesize their minds to the point where they are as capable as an adult."

"Two years!" came a chorus of voices. "That long?"

"I think that a remarkably short period," Horace said with his first show of temper. "After all they start out like a newborn babe and have to discover their hands, feet, and other parts of their bodies. They have to learn just like a human baby, except that they are full size to start with. It takes several months for them to gain self awareness alone, and to know that they are thinking beings."

"Can't all those things be built in, like the instincts of animals?"

"Hardly," Horace said.

The argument ended abruptly with Rob's return and the announcement that he had passed all tests.

Arrangements were made for a later meeting with Horace to settle financial and business arrangements. Horace and Rob shook hands with everyone and left.

As they crossed the outer office the girl behind the desk called out, "Oh, Professor!"

PROFESSOR HORACE JONES stared bleakly through the magnifying glass at the gel encased robot cranium. Tensely watching were several robots identical with Rob except in features.

"We can only hope," Horace said sadly, "that the radiations of space will kill the infection. Another six months, Rob, and it would be necessary to drain out the gel and replace it. That would mean the complete loss of the stored charges in your brain. That would be the end of you, Rob. The new mind that would be built up in your place would no more be you than are the minds of the other robots."

"It would be—death for me?" Rob asked.

"Yes," Horace replied. "And we've proven that this contamination is produced by only one thing, a radiation released by living protoplasm. No matter how we seal in and sterilize the gel necessary for the functioning of your brain, this radiation seeps in and starts the deterioration. So long as you and the other robots remain near living matter you will die in a few years. You will have to take the space ship to some planet where there is no life at all, and stay there.

"We can't tell the others—the humans who are paying for all this. It will have to simply look like an accident. That will be easy. If you drop out of sight, and I disappear with my secret of how to make a robot brain, no more will be made on Earth."

Horace looked over the assembly of quiet, subdued robots.

"Fortunately I have taught you all how to make others like you, so that you can perpetuate your race by making more and more robots. You can go on where the human race leaves off, building a civilization that will spread over the universe. Just remember that planets where life exists are death to you. The radiations of living protoplasm, no matter how you try to insulate yourselves from them, will destroy the gel in which your brain rests. And no other substance has the same properties as that gel."

"But all you planned for us to do for the human race?" Rob protested as Horace skillfully glued the plastiskin back over the braincase of his first robot creation.

"Won't matter," Horace said. "In

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fact, the human race is doomed. It isn't generally known, but the experiments at Oak Ridge that synthesized element 103 have doomed us. That is why the government has been so anxious to make contact with other planets.

"In the past five years since 103 was first synthesized it has slowly expanded until today there is no hope of stopping its progress. They told me all this when I told them it would take a couple of years to produce a robot crew for the ship."

Rob sat up slowly.

"You haven't said anything about that to us," he said. "Tell us more."

"103," Horace began, "is unlike other elements. It takes lesser elements and develops into super atoms until it reaches element 206, when it splits in half and becomes two of 103. This takes almost a year, so that a little oftener than once a year the total amount of 103 is doubled. In the steps from 103 to 206 there is a lot of atomic action that produces heat and radiation.

"Already, at Oak Ridge, there are nearly fourteen ounces of 103. Next year there will be twenty-eight ounces. And it's impossible to pick it up and shoot it off into space. It's so hot that it melts anything that touches it. In a few decades the existing 103 will turn the Earth into a molten, gaseous sun, which devours every bit of matter that falls into it. The 103 will sink and form the central core. Eventually the gasses will reach out and drag in the moon to add to the fire."

"I'm sorry," Rob said sadly. "But you? Can't we come back after we find a habitable planet and take you there?"

"No," Horace Jones replied harshly. "My presence would destroy your race wherever you go. My body is nothing but protoplasm, which gives off radiations as fatal to you as the radiations of radioactivity are to life. You must pick a completely sterile world or you won't survive."

"Then when we leave the Earth it will be good-bye?" Rob asked.

"Yes," Horace said. "Don't feel too bad about it. I'm too old to live much longer anyway."

"You'll never die for us," Rob said seriously. "We'll keep the memory of you alive forever. You are our Creator."

TWO days later the sleek cigar-shaped space ship parted the air into the heavens and sped away, while atom scientists paused in their war against the hungry 103 dissolved in the molten mixture of metal and lava that had once been Oak Ridge. And a lonely figure waved sadly from the roof of his laboratory as the ship carrying his creatures flashed overhead, its trail of white rocket gasses hanging stationary in the atmosphere to mark the path it had taken.

Only Horace knew that the ship would never return. The others were all filled with speculations and hopes of what the robots would bring back with them on their return.

Horace was eulogized in every newspaper in the world. Even as he stood on the roof of his laboratory bidding silent farewell to his robots, a host of professional biographers were busy combing his letter files and diary, compiling the history of this great scientist, this savior of humanity, this pioneer of history, this genius.

From a hidden vantage spot an enterprising camera man was taking a newsreel shot of Professor Horace Jones waving touchingly at his robots as they went where humans could not follow—as yet.

While, at Oak Ridge, radiation-

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burned scientists fought, and government censorship kept the hopeless struggle out of the newspapers.

ROB gazed thoughtfully through the huge telescope on Pluto's highest mountain. It was turned toward the Earth, which glowed with a dull redness of its own.

It had been eight hundred years since he and his fellows had landed on this outermost of all planets in the solar system. It was as far as they could get from the coming catastrophe which would pull in most of the inner planets.

With his superior intellect he had known far more than Horace Jones had guessed. He had determined, for example, the critical temperature at which superheated steam would break up into monatomic hydrogen and oxygen, tripling its volume in one giant, nova-like explosion.

He had further determined that the gravitational attraction of the Earth, transformed into almost pure 103, would increase several times over what it had been for the same mass of ordinary stuff.

The gaseous envelope would take in the moon quickly, and then Mars and Venus. In another few centuries the solar system would have two suns.

Already all life was gone from the Earth. Its crust was crumbling in the last few stubborn areas where it had resisted until the very end.

He turned at last from the telescope and went back to the giant city teeming with robots of all forms and descriptions. In each of them was a brain similar to his. In each of those brains was a mind, the resultant of millions of minute charges on microscopic condenser plates built up and separated by a process of metal plating and crystallization.

Each of the robots was essentially human in its makeup; but the norm was slowly moving away from the human pattern. Without sex, the robot mind tended to become more emotionless and more stable. With extinction something that came only by accident, the normal robot intelligence grew far more adult than the human norm had been, so that purely human things held little attraction any more than playing with a toy would have satisfied a grown human when there were human beings on the Earth.

Rob saw this gradual drift away from human standards, in himself as well as others. It was inevitable. And though he would always hold Professor Horace Jones above all else in the universe in his estimation, he was being forgotten by the others of the original space ship crew, and was frankly frowned upon by the robots built since their arrival on Pluto.

They considered him a superstition which the original robots had invented to account for the insoluble riddle of how the first robot was made. Since he couldn't have made himself, he must have been created by some other agency. Since it took elaborate equipment not found in nature, this Creator must have been intelligent. It if were a robot the riddle would just be pushed back and not answered, so a fabulous creature that had "evolved" from brute matter in some way was the invented Creator.

Rob knew that these views were never expressed in the presence of the original hundred. Such disrespect would have been unthought of. But the "truth" of the matter, that there simply had been no First Robot, but that they went back to infinity, was firmly entrenched in the popular mind.

There had been one robot, Rob remembered, Jack Johnson, who had been brave enough and foolhardy enough to

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try to get the hundred to admit the deception and confess where they had come from so they could all return to the home planet of the robots.

The hundred had made an example of him, draining out his gel and blanking his mind. No one ever mentioned Jack Johnson. Rob had not liked this treatment of the first insurgent. The will of the majority had ruled, however, as it always did.

Rob had foreseen that such treatment would never end such thoughts but merely drive them underground where they couldn't be seen. He had raised this objection and been overruled. The others had answered that the truth will triumph over everything, and the only way to deal with falsehood is destroy it ruthlessly.

The ninety-nine pointed with satisfaction to the results, the cessation of atheistic doctrine in the press, the sudden surge of enthusiastic acceptance of the truth.

Rob had looked suspiciously behind the bland exteriors of the robot population and wondered just what was going on. As the years passed he forgot his uneasiness. He knew the underground movement was now organized and active. It seemed destined to remain underground, so perhaps it would never prove a threat. Perhaps—

The metal dart punctured his cranium and ended his mental existence without warning. Other robots rushed to his assistance too late.

The one who had sent the dart was never discovered, just as no one ever discovered who had killed the other ninety-nine of the ruling group.

THE leaders of the underground stepped nobly into the breach caused by the tragic ending of the hundred and set up a democracy. The first act of the new President was to order the statue of Professor Horace Jones destroyed. With the symbol of the Creator destroyed all superstitious beliefs lost ground.

With democracy in full force, ungoverned by obsolete ideas, expansion over the planet progressed rapidly. The population increased from ten million when the hundred ceased to exist, to eighty-three billion, in a thousand years.

Science advanced apace. Nuclear physics had gone on from its first beginnings. The danger of element 103 was known. The planet Pluto would never fall victim to it.

Space travel was common, though none of the other planets were worth trying to settle on. Ships were being made that might penetrate space to other star systems eventually.

For centuries hundreds of rocket ships had scoured the spaceways for asteroids of valuable substances.

Astronomy discovered other systems with a double sun. It was proven by one great scientist that the only way a planet such as Pluto could be produced was by the sideswiping of two suns, which caused them to lose their escape velocities and to throw off huge blobs of matter which cooled into planets.

Values changed. It finally became law that any individual had a right to existence for only three hundred years. At the end of that time he was destroyed.

Periods of wiping out the superstitions of the past from time to time destroyed all libraries of the original hundred. Beliefs changed subtly. Eventually it was believed that the robot race had always existed on Pluto and had never come from some other place.

The superstition that the race had come from one of the two central suns long ago and been created by a God that lived in that sun became part of

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the folklore of the ancients, to be read for entertainment only.

IN ONE final experiment the basic nature of the universe was solved. The postulates were quickly synthesized into a mathematical structure which agreed in every detail with every known aspect of nuclear physics.

One after another the last unknown laws of nature were uncovered, by figuring on paper instead of experimenting in laboratories. The greatest revolution was in space ship construction. The old rocket principle was obsolete, replaced by the new ether-drive principle which consumed no energy at all.

Immediately huge space ships were placed under construction. Each was sixteen miles in diameter, capable of housing five million robots comfortably.

They were constructed in special space workshops circling Pluto, the metals for their construction drawn from the vast storehouses of satellite stations where the asteroid miners sold their finds.

Smaller experimental ships with the new drive principle soon began replacing the old solar cruisers. These new ships brought out the bugs in the drive principle so that in the large interstellar ships the drive was perfect.

The ancient dream or legend of an original home in some other solar system far across the galaxy was born anew. Volunteers for the trip were more than plentiful. When it was learned that the law of death at three hundred years would be lifted on space travelers everyone on Pluto volunteered.

The lucky ones were finally chosen by lot.

During the fifty years it took to complete all the ships science had marched forward to its final fruition. Everything was known about the basic operations of reality.

Even in the field of chemistry the experimental method was becoming obsolete except as verification of answers found in calculations. Atoms and molecules became compact equations. Molecular equations became a field of compatible atomic field patterns, a branch of mathematics.

The announcement of the date of departure of the fleet of interstellar ships created only a momentary flurry of excitement alongside the many startling discoveries in all branches of science.

Newspapers and television were filled with complex equations instead of words. It was predicted that shortly there would remain nothing unknown. Every possibility open to reality would be discovered by the exhaustive process, as billions of highly skilled mathematicians worked day and night in a race to be listed among the immortals of Ultimate Science.

THE Day came. The millions had been already transported to the waiting ships, circling like moons about the planet. The admirals of the fleet were all of the waiting pilgrims present at the giant celebration in the central capitol.

The President himself gave the farewell speech which lasted for ten hours and covered every possibility of what might be discovered in this maiden journey away from the solar system.

During his long speech he seemed to be hiding something. Subdued speculation was rampant as the speech progressed. Whatever it might be, it was quite evident that he intended to save it for the last.

News commentators over the television, kibitzing softly so as not to drown out the voice of the President,

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were almost unanimous in agreeing that some new honor had been devised. Perhaps a new medal had been designed. Perhaps a new rank had been created for these fleet admirals.

Finally, after nine hours and forty-five minutes, the President paused for a dramatic five minutes while tension built up.

"And now," he finally said, "I have an announcement to make that is almost as important as this pioneer flight across interstellar space itself. Just this morning I was notified that a major scientific development has taken place that opens up a vast new field of research. Where it will lead is anyone's guess at present, which is itself startling in this day of complete knowledge.

"This discovery comes at an especially proper moment. We are all envious of these pilgrims into space. Envious of the unlimited opportunities for discovery open to them but not to us. This new discovery has come to comfort us, and to give us opportunities equal to those of the space travelers, though in a different line of exploration.

"A new type reaction in chemistry has been discovered, revealing hitherto unsuspected properties of the element, carbon. Already seven distinct substances have been created having this new type reaction, and more are expected to come.

"This new type reaction is best called self-synthesis, for in it the new substances reproduce themselves out of the substances of their environment. These substances are tremendously complex, consisting of hundreds of thousands of atoms to a single molecule. They take the simple substances of their environment and add to themselves until they reach the stage where they split and become two identical molecules.

"The six substances that followed the first were developed from the first by ordinary reactions. Each of these new types increases the possible variations, and is more complex in structure than the original substance."

He smiled triumphantly at the space admirals.

"We no longer need to envy you your special opportunities for discovery," he concluded. "When you get back we may have even greater discoveries to reveal to you than you to us. Who knows what *blessings* this new field of chemistry will open up to us!"

And on the far side of Pluto a scientist, having accumulated too much of one of the new substances, dumped a quart of it down the drain. It followed the drain pipe to a nearby river, and made its way to the nearest ocean where, unsuspected by the robot civilization, it multiplied and mutated until . . . But then it was too late. Protoplasm is tenacious.

Scot Custom

★ **By Jon Barry** ★

A FUNERAL custom still prevalent in some sections of Scotland, is to carry the casket of the deceased out of the house through a hole in the wall instead of through the door. Then the hole is sealed up immediately after it has served its purpose. This is to prevent the ghost from re-entering the house because the one opening that the ghost knows about is no longer there.

Weird Vampire

★ **By J. R. Marks** ★

A VAMPIRE BAT—There is a species of bats living in the American tropics which actually does drink blood, as do the vampires of European mythology. This vampire bat does not suck blood, but drinks it. It will light silently on a sleeping animal or human being, carefully make a small, almost painless, incision, then lap up the blood which flows.

* * *

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HELL IS WHERE

By Gilbert Grant

All enemies of the Government were sent to Purgatory X. But strangely, this punishment was an unexpected blessing . . .

SHE WAS there somewhere, just ahead of him in the hall of electronic exhibits.

He could hear the dancing patter of her feet. He caught sight of her, quickened his run, and cornered her behind one of a pair of Robo-clerks.

She was smiling, and her narrowed

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YOU FIND IT!

eyes drew him toward her with a veiled, mysterious message.

"Zeena! Wait. I've got to say it; I love you, Zeena."

There was a whirring and clicking, as of levers and discs falling into place, and then the sterile, metallic voice of the metal man: "If this is adolescent love, please fill out form Zn-06584973. Do not fail to state the time of your last psychiatric examination."

She was a mist-clothed wraith dancing away from him. Now she was behind the other Robo-clerk. He tried to squeeze past the first but the metal arms spread wide and he knew better than to find himself in their crushing embrace.

"Please, Zeena," he begged. "Listen to me. I want to marry you."

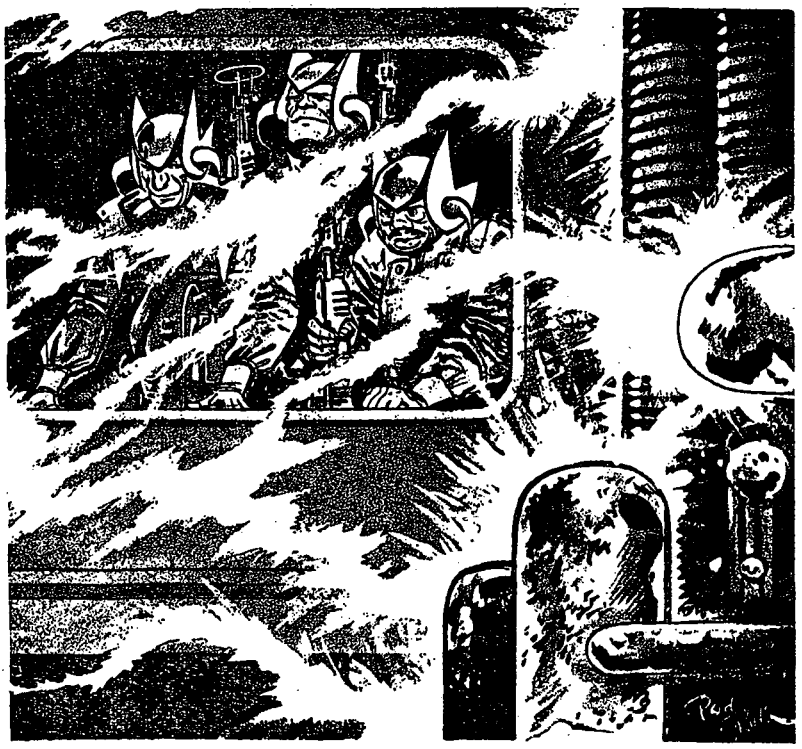
Again there was the whirring and clicking: "You will please fill out form Ztn-6748, the Form of Intent. Do not write in the lines, a, 3, 14, b-6 and b-9. Having filled out form..."

But she was gone—

Not even the sound of her footsteps.

"...Ask for Requisition number... fill out Form...use Form...get Requisition number—"

He walked the silent halls of the Museum of the Past. The halls with-



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out end, the musty halls. And suddenly something in an alcove caught his eye. It was still there, the exhibit of a past, the gaudy, glass-topped pinball machine. He slipped a coin into the slot and immediately after a metal ball slid down into the narrow funnel. The machine lit up on the inside and a colored sign glowed at the top. There it was, the name of the game. He blinked his eyes. It wasn't the game he had played as a child. 'Win The Girl' wasn't the name of the game, Nor had there been a picture of a girl in the corner.

It was Zeena! His Zeena!

Her mouth formed silent words: "Win the girl. Try...."

The ball sped up and out, struck against one of the rubber tips, caromed and struck another and a third, and finally came to rest in the slot at the bottom. But the numbers had flashed up on top and the bells had rung with each new number and he had scored twelve thousand points with his first ball. The jackpot was sixty thousand. He remembered again how he had gentled the ball up through the funnel so that it did not rebound too swiftly from the rubber tips. It was as if he were a child again.

The numbers flashed on top and the bells rang and the lights glowed and paled and soon it was the last ball and he still needed ten thousand points to win. To win Zeena!

He made it!

But now the bells had voices and the glowing numbers flashed so hard they hurt his eyes and there was a wild scream of sound: *Tilt! Tilt! Tiltiltiltilt... TILT!"*

"TILIT! Damn it, man! Open up." Tilit Macamber sat up as if he had been jerked erect by invisible wires. He was drenched in sweat; the sheet was soaked in it. And what he had seemed to hear dimly, as from a distance, was now a roaring voice from beyond the closed door: "Tilit! Open up."

He slid from the bed, called, "All right. All right. Hold up for a second," and trotted to the door and swung it wide.

The lank, angular figure of Bill Woods was bent toward him. The side light showed the hollows and angles of the lean, chiseled face, and made deeper circles of the eye sockets so that the dark eyes of the other seemed unnaturally sunken.

"What the devil was happening in there, Tilit?" Woods demanded.

"Nightmare I guess," Tilit replied. He yawned, then smiled. "Come in, man. You look as if you'd seen a ghost. Or have a hangover from too many heterodols."

The other smiled and it lent an odd pensiveness to the otherwise austere features. "Scared the sanity out of me with your howling. That's the second time this week. Tilit."

Macamber frowned. "All right. So it's the second time. Maybe I like 'em."

Woods continued to smile and stepped into the room and closed the door after him. He kicked the single chair the room boasted, to where he could slide his lank frame into it and made his ease. He pulled a pack of cigarettes from a pocket and threw the pack at Macamber after he slid one of the white tubes out of it for himself. "Here. Smoke up and cool off. Real ones; Geoff Mitol slipped them to me. Got them from a Lower City worker."

Macamber took a slow breath and after a second or two smiled in answer. It was hard to be angry with Bill Woods, and Tilit Macamber knew there was nothing short of murder, Woods wouldn't do for him.

"Oh, hell, Bill!" he confessed. "Zeena again."

This time a frown worried new lines

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over the many on the wide forehead of Woods. "Zeena...?" He folded his arms and looked ceilingward. "What's got into you lately, Tilit? I don't like to advise or say I told you so, but this has got to stop."

"It's love," Tilit sighed. "Something even the Super Board of Super City can't stop, the emotional displacement of love. Not with all the forms they can devise."

"You'll get a P-ry-X," Woods said sharply.

"Purgatory X," Tilit Macamber said flatly. "The Hell they invented to replace the one they took from the Religionists of the past. Ha. No. The yellow card won't show for me. I haven't rebelled... Or are you trying to tell me of a new order I know nothing about?"

"It's an old one, Tilit. You've just forgotten it. Let me prick you with the pin on which you can hang. Psychosomatic symptoms: mental and emotional instability. Will not cooperate toward a balanced adjustment. Shows signs of a deep-seated rebellion against forms and regulations. Want more?"

"No!" Macamber drew a few savage puffs from the cigarette and smashed it to a shapeless pulp in the ashtray.

Woods withdrew his lank frame from the chair and stood erect, an ungainly, untidy giant, whose lined face bore the look of deep inner suffering. He took the three steps which separated them and put his arms around Macamber.

"My dear, muddle-headed friend! Ah. Muddle-headed yes, but not stupid. Forthright, courageous, real. Let someone put your foot in the right path and you're the kind of man who would break down the walls, tear the barriers apart." He sighed, and let his arms fall to his side. "Guess it's time to hit the sack. I hope it'll take only one pill tonight."

Macamber, who stood but an inch short of six feet, had to look up to search his friend's eyes. "Can't you cut them out? I heard from someone, I can't remember who, that the damn things are more than just sleeping pills. They've got a hypnotic in them."

"I think so, too. I also think they've wired my place..."

Macamber's voice trembled: "A reco-disc?"

"Yes. And it's obvious they would do that only if they've prepared for the taking of subconscious records. One of these days..." He finished on that dark note.

The door closed. It was as if it had closed forever on Woods. Macamber repressed an involuntary shudder and closed the light and crept into the damp bed again. He had the strangest thought as sleep came to close his eyes.

That he was the only man in Super City who was not a worm with arms and legs—

BUSBY GANTHAM drew his dark brows together and peered through his small, cold, animal-like eyes at the others around the table. His ugly, pocked face was completely devoid of movement. Then he spoke, and the illusion of emptiness of character was instantly dispelled.

"They are like worms. Worms with legs and arms, but worms, nevertheless. Or do we have other classifications?"

There were ten others seated about the table. Only Farringham and Neilson showed distress at the word, worm. Farringham's delicate features were screwed up as if he had tasted something overripe. And now he shuddered gently. But the white-haired man at the far end, Gregor Neilson, showed nothing more than a narrowing of his old eyes. Other than that, the benign face was placid as ever.

"Ah! I see Farringham dislikes my

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choice of expression. The truth can sometimes disgust. Remember that, my super-delicate friend. And what troubles the ancient Nielson?"

"What troubles me, Gantham, will soon trouble no longer. My race is about done. But yours still has a way to go. You're making the path hard for yourself. The men who planned and founded Super City, ninety-nine years ago, did not have your view in mind. Man is not a worm."

Gantham's thick shoulders heaved. "There is a single, indisputable fact we can agree on, I believe. Nothing stand still. There is no vacuum." He smiled. It was like a snarl. "They said the ones who planned and made the H-bombs and set them off did not reason from a correct hypothesis. They thought thousands of years must pass before the Earth would become habitable again. We know otherwise. And that was why they founded Super City and gathered the millions of people into it and planned its future. For the habitation of this planet at the proper time. Well, the time has come."

"The time for what?" Nielson asked softly.

Gantham tapped out his argument with a blunt finger: "They were right. A hundred years and Super City would need new resources. Our worms will be sent out to work the planet for us, while we sit here and take our rightful ease. Eleven of us, the rulers of Super City and who knows but that we are the rulers of a Universe."

"When I was young," Nielson said after the other had finished, "I worshipped the God of science with all the devout ardor of a religion. Now, that I am old, I find my Master is a cold and sterile God. Man is more worthy of the state he has fallen to. We made machines that man should have a rightful place in the sun. That the machine shall be the slave. But the machine has become the master. I will not serve this lifeless master. Ferrardi invented the machine which sends men to that place we call Purgatory X, and the first to go into the maw of that machine was Ferrardi himself. I plead to be the last."

"Another time, Nielson," Gantham said. "And as for you, Farringham, I dislike men of too fastidious a taste. Change it. The meeting is at end, gentlemen."

WHEN THE last of them had filed through the door Gantham pressed one of a series of buzzers at his right hand. Presently the door opened again and a woman stepped through. The shapeless grey uniform she wore made it impossible to say whether she had a good figure or bad, although she walked with a certain grace. He face was barren of make-up, of course, and her hair was piled in a prim and neat bun at the back. Her features were regular and her color rather pale. She carried a notebook in her right hand.

"I am Miss Zeena Norcross, sir," she announced. "Miss Swanson had her psychiatric this afternoon and the supervisor ordered me to take your dictation."

Gantham shook a limp hand toward a chair and the girl seated herself and prepared for dictation. Gantham paced the floor behind her, his stocky figure moving with slow, stolid strides.

"Memo to all department heads. The new Robo-clerk will be placed into active use the beginning of the new work week. All clerical workers will be replaced, thus eliminating a great deal of the inefficiency so prevalent. Memo to the..." he stopped at the look on the girl's face. "Something wrong, Norcross?"

"Robo-clerks, sir?" Her words were barely audible.

He waited for her to go on. She wasn't aware of his suddenly studying glance, nor of the light which came from hiding deep in his eyes.

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"...But won't that put several thousand clerks out of work?"

"I imagine. They'll be reclassified."

"But, sir, I'm from Records and Reclassification. There is nothing for them, unless they're reclassified Lower City."

"Something we can't help."

Her eyes were wide now, and color had suddenly come into her face, making it more human and prettier, and her breast heaved in agitation, as if she felt strongly about these unknowns. "They will lose their rights, sir."

Gantham snorted from behind her. She turned and noticed his eyes for the first time, and saw they were peering into the narrow opening of the V of her blouse. One hand strayed up and clutched it closed. His eyes continued to concentrate on the spot, as if he could still visualize the smooth cream of the skin he had seen, and the soft swell of the breasts.

Suddenly his hand was on her shoulder, turning her toward him, and seconds later his free hand was pawing clumsily at the flesh beneath the bodice of her slip, while she struggled furiously and silently.

And suddenly a light glowed a deep green from the center of the table and a voice that was without character intoned: "A meeting of the Council has been called as per the orders of Chairman Gantham. The meeting is at fourteen hours..."

He looked up at the words, away from the girl, and his eyes became more sane. He whirled her to one side, and although she stumbled slightly, she managed to retain her balance. Her fingers rushed to the undone hooks while silent sobs wracked her.

"Tell your super," he said, "that as of this afternoon you will replace Swanson."

The panic in her heart was to be seen on her face, as she stepped quickly from the room.

HE HAD BEGUN to wonder if they hadn't made a mistake. Zeena should have been out an hour ago. It was almost thirteen hours now. Now and then a straggler came from the marble-faced building which housed the central committee, but there were long waits in between. But his wait was not in vain.

She came striding down the steps with an unnatural haste, and for the first time he saw her eyes light up at sight of him. And he was also quick to note how fast her breath came and that her fingers trembled slightly as they took hold of his arm.

"Oh, Tilit! Let's get away from the city. Fast as we can."

He gave her a quick glance of wonder, saw she was in a state bordering terror and moved swiftly and silently toward the tube station where they would catch the mon-cars for the parks at the edge of Super City.

Several groups of children, under the supervision of a number of specialists, were moving toward a playground to be seen in the distance. But Tilit and the girl were bent in another direction, where there were trees and flowers and some level grassland on a small flat hill.

They were alone.

He took her hand and looked up into her eyes, trying to peer below the downcast lids. "Anything wrong?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Oh. You're more quiet than usual. I thought there might be something..."

"Will you marry me, Tilit? To-day?"

He dropped her hand as if it had suddenly caught fire. "To-today," he stuttered, then recovered, and went on in an oddly derisive tone. "But darling. There are forms, and requisitions."

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"You're not being fair, Tilit."

"I suppose not. But I keep remembering the numberless times in the past when *I* asked the same question, and how I was put off. Why, now and today? Won't tomorrow do? You know the registration boards are closed and it will take two days of psychiatric examinations, my dear."

"We can get a waiver," she said.

He looked at her with stunned surprise. A waiver meant that their progeny would belong to the State, and that they would have to be reclassified with a probable lowering of their quantitative number. Even as low as to the Lower City, perhaps.

"Something happened today. Tell me about it!"

She did and when she was done, buried her face in her hands and sobbed long and helplessly.

He took her hands away and clasped her close, whispering gentle things, until finally she regained a measure of control. But while he stroked and calmed her his mind was busy.

So that was it, he thought. She wanted him to marry her because she was frightened and a man had sought her with lust and touched her virtue with passion. It wasn't that she loved, or even felt particularly drawn to him. Just protection and fear. Well, he was no less a man, with lust and passion as great as the other's. And he desired her physical love, not this shabby garment she was offering. She was beautiful to him, and like something made of stone, untouchable. And would even chance Lower City to retain her garment of virginity.

"I had another of my dreams," he said idly, not looking at her. "You've always psychoanalyzed them before." He told her the dream.

Now her face bore the look of concentration he was so familiar with. "Of course the Robo-clerks did not belong in the Museum of the Past," she said. "But they did have a place and meaning. Simply, Tilit, the dream was your sub-conscious desire to get away from all the rules and regulations that torment you."

"And what was your place in the dream?" he asked.

"You've always wanted to marry me, and I've always told you there were forms and requisitions to be filed."

"And the pinball machine...?"

"That I don't understand."

"I think I do. The pinball machine made everything clear. I won you at the end of the dream, yet I couldn't get you. The pinball machine showed *tilt*. No matter how we try, the machine is not made to be beaten. Do you think marrying me will make Gantham's lust for you lessen. It will probably grow greater. He is the head of the State, and I'm sure can send me any place he likes, even to Purgatory X, if he wants to. Don't marry me because you're frightened. Marry me because you love me."

"Love!" She laughed, and the harshness of the sudden sound startled him. "You've always thrown the word at me, Tilit, as if it were a wonder-coated needle that was supposed to penetrate my invulnerability and change me, somehow. I'm a machine, too. A woman-machine that works in Records and Reclassification. The last machine that handles the yellow cards, those little squares of paper bearing the quantitative and qualitative serial numbers, and at the bottom, in the right hand corner, the letters, P-ry-X. And when I feed the card to the machine I work at there is nothing left of what was once a man or woman. Only a memory, a memory that will soon fade."

SO THAT was where she worked. She had never told him. He understood her a little more, now. And knew, also, that below the shell of

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hardness there was a woman who was meant to be loved, a woman who needed tenderness.

She went on, "Like the memory of someone you may know. A man named Wood, from your dormitory."

His mind went blank and numb with shock. Not Bill Wood! Not Bill Wood... "Damn them!" he growled thickly. "Why? When did it happen?"

"This morning. The crime is listed, of course. Treason. Open rebellion and inciting to open rebellion, against the State. He was betrayed by a recodisc in his room. Hypnotic, sleep-inducing hetterodol pills were used. He tried to incite the workers of Lower City."

"When, Zeena? When do they exterminate him?"

"He is already a memory."

Suddenly he was crying. He lay face down on the damp earth and cried with wracking, tortured sounds. She sat up straight, on her face a look of helplessness, as if something had happened over which she had no control, for which she had no power for help. She had never seen a man cry, had never imagined a man could feel so deeply about another. And for the first time a crack broke the cold logic that was the shell of her heart. Tenderly and gently her hands stroked his hair and after a while he sat up.

He wiped the tear stains from his face with the backs of his hands. "I admired Bill," he said. "Funny. He had the guts of a million men and the gentleness of a million women. But it was there all the time. The look of a man who was going to be a martyr. I swear it, Zeena. Bill didn't die in vain!"

"Hush. Don't talk like a fool. There isn't anything you can do."

He got to his feet, pulled her along with him. "Come on. Let's walk. There's an agony in me that's got to get out. Well, it's too late to help Bill. But wherever he is he'll be glad to hear this. I know the path, now, and the walls and barriers. I'll bust them, Bill."

She looked at him, as they walked, amazed at the transformation in his face, the stony glint to the eyes, the hard, stubborn set to the chin, the sudden mask of steel he had placed over his features.

"...I prattled of love for a very long time. It was all that was on my mind. Well, I still love you, but it will have to wait. There are more important things."

"Don't be a fool," she warned him sharply. "You can't do anything. You're one against..."

"A world?" he laughed shortly. "Who wants to be in this kind of a world? I'll make a better one, or die trying."

"It's Purgatory X, Tilit! Don't you understand? Nothingness, the place of no return, the emptiness of-of, terror."

"Not for me. I never believed before. Now I am sure of it. Fear and hate, those are the words they rule with. I hate, but I'm no longer frightened."

"All right. So you're not frightened. But what can you do?"

"I don't know. I'll have to give it thought. Bill went to Lower City. They must be ripe there. If they stop working and rebel all the machinery of Super City stops. But first I want to plan clearly and well."

They were on the path leading to the tube station. The arch to one of the paths leading into the park was passed. People were streaming homeward and there was a large crowd clogging the gate to the station. Tilit drew the girl to one side.

"You can help me, Zeena."

"How?"

"Change my classification. Put me on Security Patrol. I'll be able to work better there."

"I don't know. Please. Give me a

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little time, Tilit."

He smiled grimly. "As much as you want. Eternity..."

Her head fell at the words and they walked into the station without another word.

HE SNAPPED the light on and stepped to the chest in which he kept the few extra shirts he had. Suddenly he sniffed at the air. There was a strange odor, as if of sweat, a stranger's sweat. Immediately a bell rang in his mind.

The Security Police.

He moved to the window and peered down into the street from behind the protection of the wall. Sure enough. Two of the dark-uniformed Security men were coming toward the dormitory. He whirled and ran for the chest again. The last drawer. Ah! They hadn't taken it. The cold steel of the pistol butt felt good in his palm. At least he'd go down fighting, and taking as many of them as he could.

There was a knock at the door. He called for them to come in.

They stood on the threshold, two of them, thick-bodied, flat-faced, cold-eyed.

"Tilit Macamber...?" one of them asked.

"Yes," Macamber replied. The gun lay snugly below the waistband of his trousers.

"Come along."

There was a car parked at the corner with a man behind the wheel. Tilit and the two Security men sat in the rear. It wasn't a long drive. The Security Building, a wide, low structure of dark stone, was only a few blocks from Macamber's dormitory.

The silence of the place was the first thing Macamber noticed as he walked between the uniformed men. Then, the feeling of terror. And last, the utter hopelessness of the trap. The building was full of these men, armed strong-men, all of them only too ready to use the rubber truncheons at their sides, or their fists, and as a last resort, their guns, with the horrible air pellets.

They walked down a long and silent hall and came at the end to a plain-faced door. One of the guards nudged Macamber with his elbow. "In there."

He was an officer of some kind. Frameless glasses perched on a thin, bent nose, pale eyes lowered to a report, sliver-thin mouth, nervous hands fiddling with paper.

One of the guards cleared his throat and the officer looked up. "Yes?"

"The prisoner, sir. Tilit Macamber."

"Ah. Yes. Macamber, we've just received the psychiatric examination of the reco-disc placed in your room. Not favorable at all."

"And...?" It was wonderful, this feeling of be-damned-to-you Macamber felt.

"Reassignment. Lower City."

Macamber felt his jaw drop. Was that all?

A bell tinkled close at hand and the officer looked away from the man before him and picked up the head set and listened in a stony silence for several seconds. Whoever it was spoke with incisive vigor because the three men on the opposite side of the desk could catch the strident sound, although nothing of words.

"Very well, sir," the officer said at last. "I have him here. We had a reco-disc in his room. Yes, Chairman Gantham. Immediately!"

Gantham! What the devil had he to do with Gantham, Macamber wondered? And it dawned on him. Zeena had gone to Gantham and had told him she was going to marry Tilit and had no doubt asked for a transfer.

The officer was eyeing him with cold indifference. "It seems your sins were greater than we thought. H'mm. Well, take him away. Purgatory

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X..."

Macamber leaned forward and gripped the edge of the desk. "Why?"

THE OFFICER didn't answer. His eyes went past Macamber to the two Security men. Suddenly a sledge-hammer fist took Macamber in the small of the back, and an instant later another caught him in the kidney. Pain was a crimson tide threatening to engulf him. Like a lashing whip his hand shot toward his belly. When it came up the gun was in it and he was whirling away from the desk. The blankness of the officer's face was suddenly punctuated by a black hole between the eyes. There were two more ringing shots and the room was suddenly empty of enemies.

"Three," Macamber grunted aloud. The pain was going away, and with it the dizziness. "Three more shells. But someone must have heard the sound of firing. Better get out of here."

The corridor was no longer empty. At the far end, Macamber saw a number of the dark uniforms running toward him. And from another direction three men shot out into the main corridor. There was a stairway to his right.

He was going up, four steps at a time. Bells were clanging the alarm, and he could hear the pound of feet and the shouts of voices in pursuit. Up again and to the fourth floor. As he got to the head of the stairs on the fourth floor a uniformed ugly appeared, as if by magic. Once more the pistol in his hand spoke and the other tumbled past him and rolled down the stairs to the turn. But Macamber was no longer interested. The way was clear now.

There was a passageway straight ahead of him. He turned his head left and right, saw that already the pursuers were starting to boil up from other stairways. Like a shot he was across the ten feet of open space and into the darkness of the passageway. Now he ran lightly, carefully. It was dark.

Then it was no longer dark.

He whirled, shot twice into the group coming at him and ran straight for the door at the end of the passsage. And as he opened the door and closed it shut behind him, he had time to wonder at their laughter, sudden and explosive, before a vast sheet of blinding light tore his reason to shreds. He had time only to notice the coiled tubes which lined the walls from top to bottom, and the strange humming sound.

The reason for their laughter was suddenly plain to him.

They had chased him into the very room from whence people were sent into Purgatory X. He had wondered why they hadn't used their weapons when he was in range once or twice. There had been no other place for him to go but *that* room—

Now all was peace.

But not for long. As if a giant hand had been set into action, he felt steel-like fingers grab hold, felt himself being squeezed, and knew a last terror-stricken instant, the last awareness of life. Then he was being whisked into the great mystery on huge wings.....

DARKNESS.

But only at first. His eyes accustomed themselves to the gloom and he saw a pinpoint of light in the distance. Damp breeze. The frightening reality of knowing he was alone. The conscious terror of *Death!*

But he was alive!

He got to his feet slowly, taking care as he did. Here, in the immediate present, it was dark, and he didn't know where he was. He stood erect. The light, humid wind stirred a lock of fallen hair against his forehead. That light ahead. An opening. He moved toward it with reluctant steps,

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slowly, yet with hope.

He looked down the gentle slope of a shallow valley. He was standing within the mouth of a cave. Ahead, in the near distance, the curving whiteness of a road lost itself around the flank of a hill. A road? But roads did not come of themselves. Someone built them.

He became aware of light all about him, a light he had never seen before; the light from a sun. For Super City lay deep within the earth and knew only the artificial creation of light. Macamber looked about him with wonder-filled eyes. Fleecy clouds floated in an azure sky, a soft though invigorating breeze stirred the foliage of the trees and made the gayly colored flowers nod and bend.

Then his eyes went back to the road and his feet followed their direction. And soon he was walking squarely down the center of it. He was almost at the bend of it by the side of the hill when he heard the sound of approaching footsteps. He waited for the other to come into sight. And though his heart was beating wildly not a sign of the inner turmoil showed on his lean, strong face.

It was a man. The very clothes of the stranger would have given pause to Macamber in any circumstance. The man was dressed in a sort of tunic, or gown. It clung close about the throat and fell in many folds to sweep around the ankles in loose motion that was oddly pleasing to the eye. The tunic was of a white material and purple edging was the only color contrast.

It was hard to guess the stranger's age, for though he was smooth shaven there was an aura of age about him. Yet Macamber couldn't put his finger on what gave him that impression. The stranger stopped also at sight of Macamber. Then a smile broke on the man's lips and he came on again. Not Macamber. He stood still.

"From Super City, I see," the man said.

Macamber's eyes went wide.

"Well, continue along this road. Crystal City is but a short distance off. You will see friends soon."

The stranger started to pass Macamber but stopped again when Macamber said, "Crystal City? But isn't this Purgatory X?"

"Only in your mind," the other replied. Once more he smiled. Macamber was aware of its friendliness. "Don't be frightened. All of you come to us in the cave. We used to wait but that frightened you even more. And soon enough you see the road and after..."

"We use it and come to Crystal City," Macamber said.

"Very right."

"Then I won't be the exception. Thank you, sir."

The other nodded gravely and moved on. Macamber stood looking at the rather graceful walk of the stranger for a moment, then turned and made the bend in the road.

IT WAS the most fabulous city he had ever seen. A city of towering crystal. Domes, cubes, rectangles, and triangles, all of crystal and all reaching toward the sky with tender, searching fingers.

Not too far ahead of him.

He passed a number of signs but gave them little heed. One caught his eye and he stopped sharp in amazement. The sign said, simply, "To those of Super City: Ferrardi and Company may be found in the Inn of the Seven Wise Men. Come one, come all."

A whistling sound made him turn. A strange vehicle was coming down the road. It gleamed with a high shine, yet was black and lustrous. He gauged its length at about ten feet and its diameter at about four. Quite suddenly it stopped and a door swung

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open along the entire length and a voice came to Macamber:

"Lift?"

It was another of the tuniced men. He was seated at the controls of the vehicle. And like the first, his age was also undetermined by visual factors, and also like the first, there was a gentle smile about the lips.

"Thank you," Macamber said as he made himself secure in the only other seat alongside of the driver.

"Super City?" the driver asked as he pressed a plunger home.

"Yes. But how did you know?"

"Our only visitors. We've become quite accustomed to you people since Ferrardi first came among us. You've seen the directions we've placed at vantage points on the road?"

"Oh, yes."

"I'll drop you off. I pass the Inn."

Macamber filled his senses with the passing scene. But of it all he was most impressed with the people. The fact that the city's streets were wide and clean or that the architecture was strange and wondrous made less of an impression than the fact that he did not see a child who was not laughing, or a grown-up who was frowning, although he did see some who were more serious than others.

Abruptly the strange car stopped and the hinged door swung down though Macamber did not see the driver manipulate any lever. "There it is, my friend. Ferrardi will make you welcome."

There was a sign above the doorway but Macamber did not see it, nor did he pay too much attention to what the outside looked like. His concern was with the interior and Ferrardi, a name dimly remembered.

The Inn was full of men and women, talking, laughing, gesticulating, and all in all seeming happy. He stood on the threshold a second or two, just looking on. And suddenly a remembered voice shouted, "Tilit! Tilit Macamber, by all that's holy!"

It was Bill Woods.

THEY POUNDED each other's back, embraced, held each other apart, and embraced again. And all the time the words poured from them, each speaking at will so that nothing made sense and the only thing that mattered was that they were together again.

It was Woods who finally brought them to the present. "Come along with me to meet Ferrardi. The grandest guy you'll ever meet and the reason for your being here."

He was the central figure in the huge group about an immense table. Macamber knew Ferrardi must have been in his sixties at this time, yet no matter how Macamber's eyes pried he could see no visible sign of age. Ferrardi looked thirty. He was a thickset man with a wide, earthy face, arranged pleasantly in all its features, and as an exclamation point to the arrangement, a short beard of the Imperial type adorned the chin.

"Welcome," Ferrardi smiled and nodded abruptly. Macamber was to come to know the gesture well. "And I see you have already found an old friend. You will see and find more of them in time. Welcome to Crystal City, though you may think it is another place. As close to Heaven, however, as anything I know. Welcome."

The others echoed Ferrardi's shout of "welcome" and lifted their happy faces toward Macamber.

"Thank you," Macamber said.

He felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned and saw Woods' lean, angular face bent toward him. "Come along, you idiot, and tell me how you got mixed up enough to get sent here."

It did not take long.

"Well, all I can say is that you're well out of it," was Woods' comment.

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"Well out of it."

"I suppose so," Macamber said. But there was the serried look of a frown on his face.

Woods had taken the other to a table removed from the central one and now the two sat over cups of a sweet-flavored brew that was somewhat like coffee.

Woods noticed the beginning of the frown. "Uh, unh! This is a happy land. Can't have that here."

Macamber grinned. "I know. The first thing I noticed. But there's still..."

"Oh, no!" Woods exploded. "Not Zeena. Don't say that."

"I have to."

"Well, then we'll have to see Ferrardi about this. Come on."

"YOU'RE new here, Macamber," Ferrardi pointed out. "But this I can tell you. You are free to do what you will, marry whom you please, be as happy as you wish. Good heavens! There are any number of women in Crystal City who can take this Zeena's place in your heart."

"I'm afraid not. Besides, I think she is in actual danger."

"H'mm! What kind?"

"Gantham, the Chairman of the Board, wants her."

"Gantham, eh?" Ferrardi grew introspective. His hand stole up to stroke the silky beard. "Again Gantham, always Gantham. A pity."

"That doesn't help, sir," Macamber said.

"What would you have me do?"

"They tell me you are responsible for the manufacture of the machine. I would like to return to Super City."

Silence fell. An awe-filled silence. They looked at Macamber as if he had suddenly gone mad. Go back to Super City. Surely he *was* mad.

"But why?" Ferrardi asked.

"For Zeena."

"I would say that love has been carried to excess in your case. Were she the very paragon of everything womanly, I would not want to return to that place of dismal beings, fear-filled and hate-filled."

It was all suddenly clear to Macamber then. Ferrardi had spoken the magic words.

"Can you build another machine, sir?" Macamber asked.

"That would be simple enough. But the reason for building it would have to be greater and more urgent than the one you've given, though I admire your gallantry."

"Then I would like to return to make clear to people that there is nothing to fear in Purgatory X, that their most urgent desire should be to gain entry to the machine which sends them here."

A pensive smile broke on Ferrardi's lips. His eyes sparkled at the thought behind them. "I like that. Yes. Dispel the fear and you break their chains. Of course there is still death. Gantham could *kill* them...."

"Not if he never knew why they wanted to go to Purgatory X," Macamber pointed out.

It was Bill Woods who decided the issue.

"I'd like to go along, sir," he said. "I have a score to settle with Gantham, also."

"So have we all," Ferrardi said. "Nor I the least. Well, the more I think of it, the more I see of it. I believe you, too, will see what I do, after you get there. Very well. I will seek permission." He held up his hand to quiet their sudden outburst of joy at his agreement. "Let us keep in mind that we are on another plane in the same time interval as the Earth. I broke through that plane. I may not be able to return. However—"

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THE MACHINE was finished in amazingly swift time, though to Macamber, champing in impatience, years had passed since it was begun. Ferrardi was quite proud of it. It stood on a grassy plain and the whole population of Crystal City had turned out to watch Bill Woods and Tilit Macamber step into it.

"This one is different in some essentials from the one in Super City," Ferrardi said. He patted the cold metal side in affection. "There are two compartments in this one. One does the transmitting and the other the receiving. H'mmm! Yes, it is an improvement. Well, gentlemen, are you prepared for the return trip?"

They smiled and he answered gravely. "I did not think to see the day anyone would want to return. Well, go and come back quickly. We shall be anxious until we see you again."

The two men stepped inside the door and stood close together, gripping each other's hand. The tubes and coils glowed, and each felt again the giant grip and the sudden feel of winged uplift, and last, the utter peace of nothingness.

Ferrardi had calculated to a nicety where they wanted to land. The dim fastness of Lower City greeted their awakening. Woods said he knew where they would find safety among the workers. They opened their eyes and senses to find themselves in a small parkland.

"Back to the real Purgatory," Woods said drily.

"But not for long," Macamber said mysteriously. "Not for long."

The familiar sight of a Security patrol kept them silent until the patrol passed.

"I came along," Woods went on, "because I wanted to help. But I can't see how we're going to get all the people into the machine. There must be a million in Super City alone. And what of the *millions* here?"

"Who said anything about taking them anywhere?" Macamber asked drily.

Woods' eyes went wide in startled comprehension. "I *am* stupid! Of course. What made you think of it, Tilit?"

"What was pointed out to me from the very beginning. The difference between Crystal City and this place is a laugh."

"What a way to rebel. What a way to tear the walls down! I once said you'd do it if they put your feet on the right path." Woods squeezed the other's shoulder in rough affection.

"The one you've always derided. Zeena." Macamber did not say how unwittingly it was done. "But let's get to work. You know people, the right ones, down here. I'll work from above. It's fifteen hours now, time for the office people to get out. I'll station myself where Zeena will see me. Shall we meet in East Park in the morning?"

"Right. Just past the arch."

HIS HEART leaped at sight of her. Then he tumbled at the look of despair in her face. He called her softly as she passed, and for an instant thought she hadn't heard.

"...Zeena. It's me, Tilit...."

One foot was lifted in a half step. She did not turn, but let the foot descend all the way. He could see her stiffen, see her head come up. He moved softly to her side and said, "Don't be frightened. It isn't a ghost."

She turned and he saw then the tear drops gathering. She did not cry aloud, but rather without sound, without visible emotion. Just the tears gathering and falling. But there were stars in her eyes, and the most tremulous smile he had ever seen.

"Tilit...My love."

He took her arm and steered her

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down a side street, away from the huge square where the building of the Minstries were, like monoliths of doom. They walked so in silence until the street was empty of people and they were quite alone. And finally they came to a spot where there was a bench.

For a long moment he held her close, not saying anything, or even touching her in any way. There was a deeper, truer love in not doing. "I've waited a long time to hear that from you," he said at last.

"It was a long time in coming. Why did I know of it only when you were gone?"

He didn't answer.

She went on. "I guess it had to be that way. Now tell me. What happened? Gantham told me he had you sent to Purgatory X. He lied."

"No he didn't. I was sent there. It's not Purgatory at all! This is the real purgatory—and I've come back to change it. Now tell me, Zeena darling, has it been bad since I've been gone?"

"Gantham has been very busy. I think he has plans for doing something of great importance. It's no good, whatever he has in mind. No," she stopped his words by putting soft fingers against his mouth. "He hasn't touched me since that first day. But I feel his eyes, and I cringe when he comes close. But so far he's been too busy, as I said."

Macamber looked off into personal distances. "Zeena. Do you sit in on their meetings?"

"Yes. The last two, anyway."

"Are there Board members who hate Gantham?"

"Gregor Nielson and Farringham. Farringham fears more than he hates. But the old man fears no one and nothing. Sometimes he taunts Gantham, but Gantham treats him with contempt, and even worse, does not listen to him."

"Good! Can you get Nielson's ear? Tell him I would like to meet with him somewhere, that I have come back, and that I have great news for him from Ferrardi. Do you think you could manage that?"

"I think so."

"Tomorrow?"

"Tonight, if you wish! I have Nielson's audio number."

"Wonderful! Would you like to come along?"

"I just want to be wherever you are."

He kissed her then. It was the first time.

THE OLD man's eyes sparkled with a look of sudden youth.

"Wonderful!" he crowed. "Wonderful! Now I understand why Ferrardi went into the machine with a smile. How wise and clever he was. But what you plan doing... To conquer fear and hate. Think of it. The very fear in which we have lived for so long under Gantham to be ended. Yes, Macamber, I will help. If only to see Gantham overthrown."

Zeena squeezed herself close to Macamber's side. They were in the old man's quarters where they had gone after calling him. He had wanted them to come immediately.

"I thought I was in Heaven," Macamber said. "And I realized for the first time that what made Crystal City a Heaven was that people laughed and were happy there. But why go there? We can have it here."

"Yes, yes! Right here," Nielson said. "Now let me see. This Woods person is in Lower City. You say he can handle them. Super City will take a different technique. Let me think a moment."

He slapped his palms together with an abrupt gesture. "I have it. Fight fear with fear. This will take a little longer perhaps, but will be the least dangerous. I want you to appear

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at the next meeting. Tomorrow afternoon. Zeena will pass in. I will give you whatever leads you'll need."

Macamber nodded in agreement.

"As for tonight, stay here and keep an old man company. Both of you."

"I'll be reported," Zeena objected.

"Certainly. It's what we want. No more fear, of anything."

"I can hardly wait," Zeena said, "to see Gantham's face when he sees I don't care about the report."

"IT IS a fortunate thing I am concerned about this," Gantham said. "Don't let it happen again, Norcross."

Zeena smiled. "Why not? I rather liked it. The first freedom I've ever had."

"It will be the last," Gantham promised. "Do not think you can trifle with me. The Machine has taken more important people than you."

This time she laughed aloud. "Oh, pooh! Your old machine. I think the rest of the Board are waiting for you..."

He stood and came close to her. There was admiration in his eyes. and his hand suddenly stroked her arm. She quivered and moved back a step.

"I like you, Norcross. You have spirit. Not a wooden thing like the others. But don't try me too hard."

She said nothing but her eyes and mouth were set and thoughtful.

Gantham called the meeting to order. His brusque notice of old business set the stage for what he had in mind, to tell the Board that he was prepared to begin the first stage of discovery of what lay beyond Super City. He didn't get to it. Gregor Nielson called for attention, first. Gantham frowned, as though the angry glance should have proved warning enough. But the bland face showed no signs of having seen the look.

"Gentlemen, I have strange news for you. There was laughter in Lower City- today."

They looked at the old man as if he had gone mad.

He went on: "The first time in the history of man. I let the news out on the telescreens in all public places. Thought it warranted attention. Something else, too. I'm a bit tired of our Chairman's desire for personal glory. I think we, as a group, should repress him somewhat."

They knew he was mad, now. All but Farringham. Nielson had briefed him quickly.

"I second the speaker's motion," Farringham said. And for the first time returned Gantham's stare with equanimity.

"It is interesting to note," Gantham spoke easily, without visible sign of anger, "that our colleague has taken attention to the fact that he is no longer of public use. It will be a matter of safety, for all in Super City, that he be sent to Purgatory X, as it is called. The place from which no one returns."

"Oh. I forgot," Neilson broke in. "There was another matter I thought the public should know of. It concerns a Tilit Macamber. Would you like me to continue?"

GANTHAM HAD gone pale at the mention of the name. His mouth was a pale line of anger and his eyes promised a quick doom to the old man. But he said nothing.

"I spoke to Macamber last night...."

"You're crazy," Gantham did break in this time. "I had his yellow card sent down. He is dead."

"Why is he dead?"

"He was an enemy of the State. That is why he died. That's why they all die."

"All? No matter. It's true, isn't it, that Macamber was placed in the machine, or rather, driven into it, be-

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cause you lusted for Zeena Norcross your personal secretary, and his loved one?"

"I won't answer any charge as ridiculous as that. Further, I am calling for a patrol to have you removed." His finger pressed at the buzzer close to hand.

The door opened, and without turning, Gantham said, "Summon a guard, Norcross. Immediately!"

"Why?"

The voice made him whirl. Gantham had never seen Macamber, yet he had no doubts that this man standing now at the closed door was he.

"Why?" Macamber said. "To have him sent to Purgatory X? But he isn't afraid. When you take the fear of Hell away from a man, he can no longer be held in bondage. I don't think anyone will be afraid, after tonight." He moved forward until he was standing at the old man's side. "But let me introduce myself. I am Tilit Macamber, late of Purgatory X. Don't be frightened. I assure you I'm no ghost. I have a message for you all. From Ferrardi, your old friend. He says that he is becoming angry with the number of people you are sending across the void. And that he is going to send them back, armed however, in case they might not find welcome here. Gentlemen! Think a moment. The worst rebels you can conceive of, all arriving together, and armed. Not a pleasant thought, is it?"

"This man is lying!" Gantham shouted. "He was never there."

But Tilit was prepared. The first thing he had Zeena do was get his yellow card. As Gantham's personal secretary she had managed it before reporting to his office. She had passed it to him when Gantham rang for her. Now he showed it all around.

"My passport, gentlemen! Now listen to me! All these years you have lived with fear, slept with it, ate with it. Purgatory X. The yellow card. No one knew when their turn would come. The device of this man to keep you, and a whole city, under his thumb. I just lifted the thumb for you. Would you like to lift the whole hand?"

There wasn't a sound. It wasn't necessary.

There was a strange and terrible smile on Gantham's lips. He stood up, shoved his chair backward, and said: "I'm not afraid. Not of you, or Purgatory X. Now what?"

"I suggest, gentlemen," Macamber went on, as if Gantham had said nothing, "that since the power of doing is in your collective hands, the first step is to abolish, first, Gantham, then the machine and the vicious system built around it...."

There were vigorous nods of agreement.

"...Let the telescreens broadcast the news immediately. After the news of Gantham's arrest."

Thick-bodied as Gantham was, he moved with cat-like swiftness. Whirling, he shot to the door, opened it and ran through.

"Order his arrest!" Macamber bellowed as he gave chase.

THE CHASE had gone on all day but Gantham had still not been apprehended by nightfall. Macamber had sent Zeena home and had gone out with a squad of Security men. Bill Woods joined them later. The entire day had passed and still no word of Gantham, not even a hint of where he could have gone.

Unaware that the chase had led in the direction of Zeena's dormitory Macamber became aware of it only when Bill Woods pointed it out.

"Look, Tilit! Why don't you go in and keep Zeena company? Gantham will be taken without your help. Go on, now!"

Macamber smiled and agreed.

The halls of the dormitory were

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silent; it was quite late. He approached Zeena's room on tip-toe, hoping she was still awake. He placed his ear to the door and listened. His eyes went wide and strained at what he heard.

Strange animal sounds, muffled sobs of terror, and then, Gantham's voice, broken and hoarse: "Now. Too late. I'll have you before I go out—"

Macamber took three steps backward, then lunged forward with all his power and weight. The door splintered open and he crashed through.

Gantham was bent over Zeena, whose clothing had been torn almost completely from her. He had a pistol in one hand and with the other was pinning the girl down. Purple bruises stained her face and a dribble of blood slipped from a corner of her mouth.

Before Gantham could do more than straighten, Macamber was on him. Gantham was heavier, stronger but less agile. He brought the gun up but Macamber chopped at the hand holding it and the pistol fell to the floor. But by chopping down at the gun Macamber had been forced to come in close. It was what the other wanted.

A growl of animal fury sounded deep in his throat as he got hold of Macamber's neck with his thick, stubby fingers.

A red haze floated up before Macamber's vision. He tried to tear the choking fingers from his neck, even tried to knee the other, but Gantham held him too close. The haze thickened. And it came to Macamber that this time he was going to die. He raked his clawed fingers down the other's cheeks, but Gantham only growled deeper. He sounded quite mad, now.

Tighter, tighter, as a noose grows tighter—

The sound of the pistol was like the popping of cork to Macamber. But the loosening of the grip on his throat, the return of life, of breath, was something he understood. He staggered backward, felt the touch of soft arms, the sound of a voice sobbing, "My darling. He tried to kill you..."

Now he could see.

Gantham lay in a pool of blood which poured from his mouth and ears. But he was still conscious. There was a light of triumph in his eyes. His lips opened and words came dimly to the man and woman:

"Not Purgatory X, anyhow..."

"No," Macamber said. "Not there. It's Hell where you're going..."

THE END

NEW OUTLOOK

★ **By Max Long** ★

DON'T EVER get the idea that nothing new can be invented! That old gag about "nothing new under the sun," is just a lie. To confirm that statement examine some of the new inventions which have come out and you'll be startled. A particular case of this is that old standbye, the circular saw.

If you've ever looked at a circular saw blade, you've noticed that it has a lot of small teeth set around a rim of a wheel and in action it chews its way through a piece of lumber like a beaver going through a log. In other words, you'd say that that was it; the circular saw was perfect for its job. But it isn't!

Somebody else has come up with a simple variation of the circular that worked infinitely better! All they did was to take a blade and instead of lots of little teeth, they put a small number of large teeth on it—sort of making a "chiseler" of it. The result is that this blade doesn't make one-tenth of the noise of a regular one, it cuts through wood many times faster, it doesn't make saw-dust, but shavings or chips, and generally speaking is better all the way around.

So the next time you examine some commonplace, everyday article, look at it with a critical eye; the chances are a hundred to one that it can be improved on in some way. And very often a golden rainbow awaits the improver!

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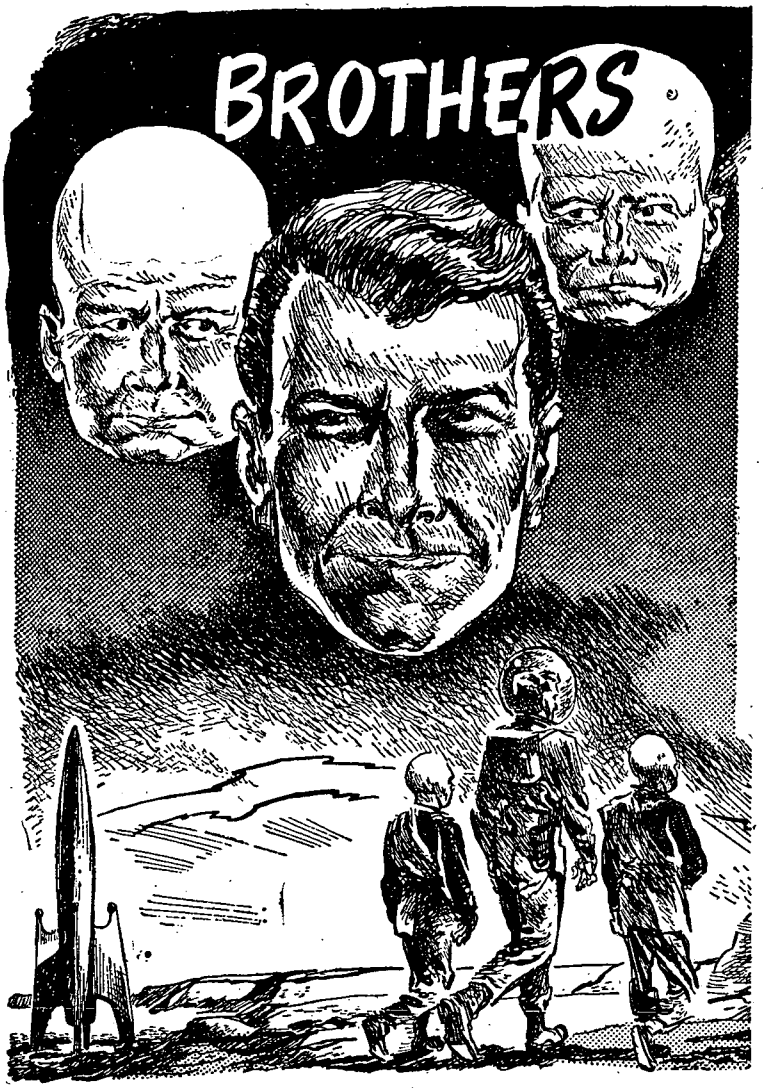

There's nothing in the world that man won't do for his brother. If, that is, brother doesn't want anything done . . .

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BEYOND THE VOID

IT WAS a matter of great satisfaction to Marcusson that he could be with Sam Conrad upon the eve of his great adventure. Marcusson's day had been full; the final briefing during the morning hours at the Foundation headquarters; the many handshakes and well-wishes—these carried over into the afternoon cocktail party given in his honor.

The party had been a boring affair because Marcusson did not care for liquor, the fevered enthusiasm which always went with it, nor the brittle garden variety of compliment:

"Oh Mr. Marcusson! You've no idea how thrilled I am to shake your hand!"

"You'll make it, boy—make it and come back again. A little thing like space won't stop you!"

"Would you just give me one little old autograph, Mr. Marcusson? Here on my scarf. I'd be so thrilled."

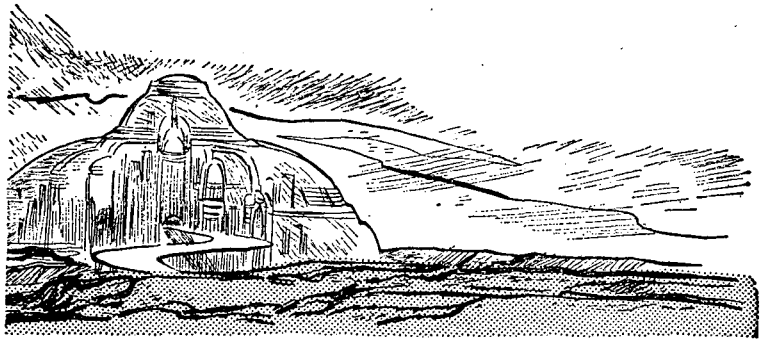
Boring.

So Marcusson had left at the earliest opportunity and hastened away to spend his last evening on earth—for a time at least—with Sam Conrad. They sat on Conrad's vine-covered porch and there was lemonade in a pitcher filled with tinkling cubes of ice; that, the fragrant night, and the quiet restful aura of a true friend.

Wonderful.

Marcusson lay back in his chair and closed his eyes. "I'll remember this," he said.

Sam Conrad puffed on his pipe. "I'm honored. The world's most cur-



By Paul W. Fairman

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rently famous man comes to visit me."

"Cut it out. My head's crammed full with that kind of rot. It's also full of exact science and cold mathematical calculations. Facts and figures haunt my dreams. I want some good steadying conjecture—some of your tobacco-stained philosophy to wet down the indigestible mass."

"Are you afraid, Charles?"

"No—no, I don't think so." Marcusson leaned suddenly forward in his chair. "Sam—what do you think *I'll find?*"

Conrad shrugged. "Your men at the Foundation would know more about that than I. Mars is really beyond the abstract and restful philosophies—"

"Let's not kid ourselves. They know nothing at all—I know nothing."

"Nor do I. But let's project a bit from what solid ground we have. We'll look at it this way: you are a lone Earthman hoping to set your feet on the planet Mars. Therefore, your instinctive interest is in your own safety. What sort of people will you find there—if any? Will they haul you from your ship and kick the life out of you? Will they find pleasure in tearing you to pieces?"

"What do you think, Sam?"

THE OLDER man poured two leisurely glasses of lemonade. "We can project with a fair chance of being right. Mars is an old planet. There will certainly be no newly evolved life-forms there. So, if you find living creatures, they will certainly have every right to be called *people.*"

"I'll go along with that."

"And *people,* Charles, are the same everywhere."

"I don't know—"

"There is absolutely no reason why they shouldn't be. In constructing humankind, Nature invented a fixed formula—a pattern of behavior built upon basic instincts to meet certain physical needs and spiritual conditions. Those conditions, so far as a *humanoid* is concerned, are the same here on Earth as they would be in the furthest reaches of space. Physical characteristics, of course, are changeable to meet changed geographical and geological conditions. But such things are only trappings; outer garments, so to speak. The spiritual and emotional care of the *humanoid* is as fixed as the stars."

"Then you believe people are the same everywhere?"

"People—wherever they are able to exist—are all the same."

Marcusson left an hour later. He shook hands with Conrad at the gate and pointed to a certain spot in the heavens. "Tomorow night about this time, look just—there. You may not see me, but don't forget to look."

"I certainly shall. Good luck."

As Marcusson drove home, he thought again of Conrad's words and found a comfort in them. Not that he was afraid, he assured himself.

Then he refuted that assertion and admitted the truth. Of course he was afraid. Any man in his position would know fear whether he admitted it or not. So the words of his friend were a comfort.

People—wherever they are able to exist—are all the same. And as he went to sleep, the thought was still there: *People are all the same.*

EVERYTHING went off as scheduled—as smoothly and efficiently as Foundation know-how and money could make it. And Marcusson was struck—later—by how swiftly it all slithered into the past and found a storage-niche in his memory. He thought of this when he was far out in space and there was time to think.

He also thought of Sam Conrad.

But the schedule ran true, and before too long there were other things

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to think about. A planet rearing up out of the void to seemingly snatch at his little craft and bring it into strange port.

Here, the mathematics failed to some extent. Marcusson was supposed to have set down in daylight, but as he arced in out of his orbit, the moons of Mars were racing through the sky. This was a bit disappointing, but he set down safely, so the mathematics could not really be charged with failure. He left the ship, cautiously removed his oxygen mask, and found he could breathe. Also, that he was exhausted to a point of physical weakness. He sat down on the cool ground for a moment's rest. He slept.

He awakened. Daylight was blazing down. He blinked.

And saw the Martians.

THERE WERE two of them—males, Marcusson decided. One was about three inches shorter than the other and the taller stood roughly four feet five inches. They wore clothing of a loose, comfortable sort. The garments were dyed in the brightest hues imaginable and, while they hung to body contour, they seemed to be starched or impregnated with some similar substance.

The Martians were not ugly nor especially beautiful from the standpoint of an Earthman's eye. Nor was the land striking in any manner whatsoever. There was a gray spired city off to the left, but the only Martians in sight were the two males who stood at a safe distance regarding him.

One of them was obviously armed. He carried a small stick with a butt set into it at right angles. He gripped the butt tightly in his small fist, but made no motion to use the weapon.

But Marcusson paid scant attention to all this. These were merely the outer trappings—the superficial structurework in which these people existed. He was interested basically and tensely in—the Martians.

He got slowly to his feet, careful to make no sudden movements. They were alert, wary, but not afraid. They had eyes of a particularly clear sea-green, and behind these eyes was intelligence. They paid no attention to the ship, having evidently inspected it to their satisfaction while he slept. They watched Marcusson and discussed him between themselves in a musical language—a pleasant, bird-like warble that gave off most ably the nuances of mood, thought, and inflection for which anyone unfamiliar with a language always listens.

Marcusson tentatively extended a hand, thinking, with elation, that all was well. People were the same everywhere. These could be two Earthmen inspecting an interplanetary arrival on Terra. Their reactions, their natural caution, their instincts, were of the same pattern exactly.

One of them was eyeing the gun on Marcusson's hip. Quite obviously, the Martian knew what it was. Marcusson made no motion toward it. Rather, he smiled and raised his hand, palm outward.

"I am Charles Marcusson. I come from Earth. I come in peace and with a spirit of brotherhood." He didn't expect them to understand, but he had invented that speech during the long hours in void and wanted to get it off his chest.

The Martians glanced at each other with bright interest. They did not speak to Marcusson but discussed something between themselves, glancing now and again at the spires of the city beyond the rolling hills.

IT WAS obvious to Marcusson that they were attempting to arrive at some decision. A moment later he knew this had been accomplished because they nodded in agreement and

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turned their attention to the Earthman.

But cautiously and with ever-present alertness. The one with the weapon motioned—a beckoning motion—after which he pointed across the hills toward a spot somewhat to the right of the city.

Then, both Martians invited Marcusson to walk in that direction by doing so themselves. They stopped, glanced back expectantly, and both of them smiled.

Marcusson chuckled inwardly at these hospitable and kindly gestures. Without hesitation, he moved in the indicated direction. The Martians registered, between themselves, a marked satisfaction. An almost child-like elation, Marcusson thought, at getting their simple ideas across to him. They did not come close, but moved to a point on either side of him and well out of harm's way if he made a quick movement. The armed one kept his weapon ever at ready, but his smile mirrored the friendliness in his mind.

Marcusson estimated they had traveled about four miles when they moved over a low hill and came to the house. Obviously it was a house, but it was like nothing Marcusson had ever seen in the way of a dwelling.

It was a perfect square and no attempt had been made to achieve beauty. Each side ran about twenty feet, and beside it was a smaller square, identical in every respect except size. Grayish windowless walls about ten feet high. Marcusson got the impression of a stockade with a roof, and a tool shed hard by.

The door was merely a section of the wall that pushed inward. Marcusson would have had trouble locating it. One of the Martians opened the door and then both of them stepped back, a careful distance away, and indicated. Marcusson was being invited to precede them.

This he did and was struck immediately by the lighting system inside; or rather, by the apparent absence of a lighting system. He could not discover from whence came the illumination; yet, through some indirect means, there was shadowless light throughout the single room of the house.

Swiftly he took the place in, and marveled at the entirely different manner in which another race on another planet could arrive at the same objective as the inhabitants of Earth. While the contents of the great room bore no similarity to the furnishings of a Terran home, yet there was no doubt that people could live here comfortably and adequately.

They'll be surprised, he thought, *when I tell them about this back in New York.*

The Martians entered behind him, closed the door and looked at each other in complete understanding.

NEVER IN his life had Marcusson had such a feeling of contentment, well-being, and achievement. At times he thought to marvel at how smoothly everything had gone. Time slipped by and he felt no sense of urgency, because each day brought accomplishment in increased knowledge of these people.

He did not see any Martians other than the two in whose house he lived. And he got the idea he was being jealously guarded by these two; sort of an honored guest they didn't care to share with their world.

This amused him and he made no protest because he felt all that could be taken care of in due time. Besides, he was learning a great deal about the Martians. He discovered they were far ahead of Earthlings in many facets of science. The lighting, for instance. He was never able to discover from whence it came. Yet he knew

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that it was artificial.

The small shed next to the house seemed to contain a great many things they needed. He was never invited to enter it and did not press the point, but he felt sure the lighting, the refrigeration, the water supply and all the Martian's conveniences of living originated in that small building.

He was somewhat surprised that, while the two Martians were unfailingly attentive and courteous, they continued to mistrust him. They never came close to him in a pair. Always one stood back on the alert, ready to use the small weapon if necessary.

He discarded his own weapon the first night, as a gesture of friendship. He was disappointed, but not discouraged, when they did not reciprocate.

Yet he had no complaint. It was a little like having two excellent servants to do his bidding night and day.

And he was puzzled at the continual air of anticipation between them. They had long discussions in the soft liquid language and, though he couldn't understand it, he felt it was all of a tenor, always relative to the same subject.

THEN CAME the day he'd hoped for—the day they definitely became more intimate with him. The taller of the two took the initiative in the missionary work, and after a little time Marcusson found out what he was driving at. He wanted to know about the place Marcusson had come from.

Their intercourse took on varied forms. Marcusson printed the word *Earth* on a metal writing plate and the Martian swiftly understood. He put down some spidery hieroglyphics of his own and Marcusson picked up a smattering of the language. But not much. It was very difficult.

Most of the communications were by way of drawings. When Marcusson indicated the Martian domicile with a wave of his arm and then sketched a Terran cottage, the Martian was highly elated and went into conference with his partner.

The Martian evinced a tremendous interest in the sketch and Marcusson elaborated upon it greatly, sketching out the rooms, the furnishings, and several outside angles until the Martian appeared satisfied.

On the day following the final sketching of a Terran dwelling place, Marcusson awoke to find what he rated as almost a miracle. The Martians alertly invited him outside and over the brow of the nearest hill. Marcusson gasped.

They had built him a house.

They watched him closely for his reaction, and were pleased when it was favorable. Marcusson moved forward in a daze, entered the cottage and felt himself to be back on Earth. Every detail of his sketches had been carried out with amazing accuracy. The furniture, the floor coverings, the wall-paper—even the light fixtures were in place. And when Marcusson snapped a wall switch, the bulbs gave forth the yellow radiance he had known on Terra.

He was astounded. *They are far ahead of us,* he thought. *Beside them, we are children. Here advance science is commonplace. Science of which we have not even dreamed.*

But Conrad was right, he thought warmly. *They are people. Basically they are no different from us.*

Marcusson moved into his new home that night, much to the delight of the Martians. He ate his dinner at a table which could have come from any Terran furniture store. He lay down in a bed any Terran would have been proud to own.

The Martians did not dine with him. Instead they stood by, conversing in their soothing musical language, happiness mirrored in every syllable.

(continued on page 121)

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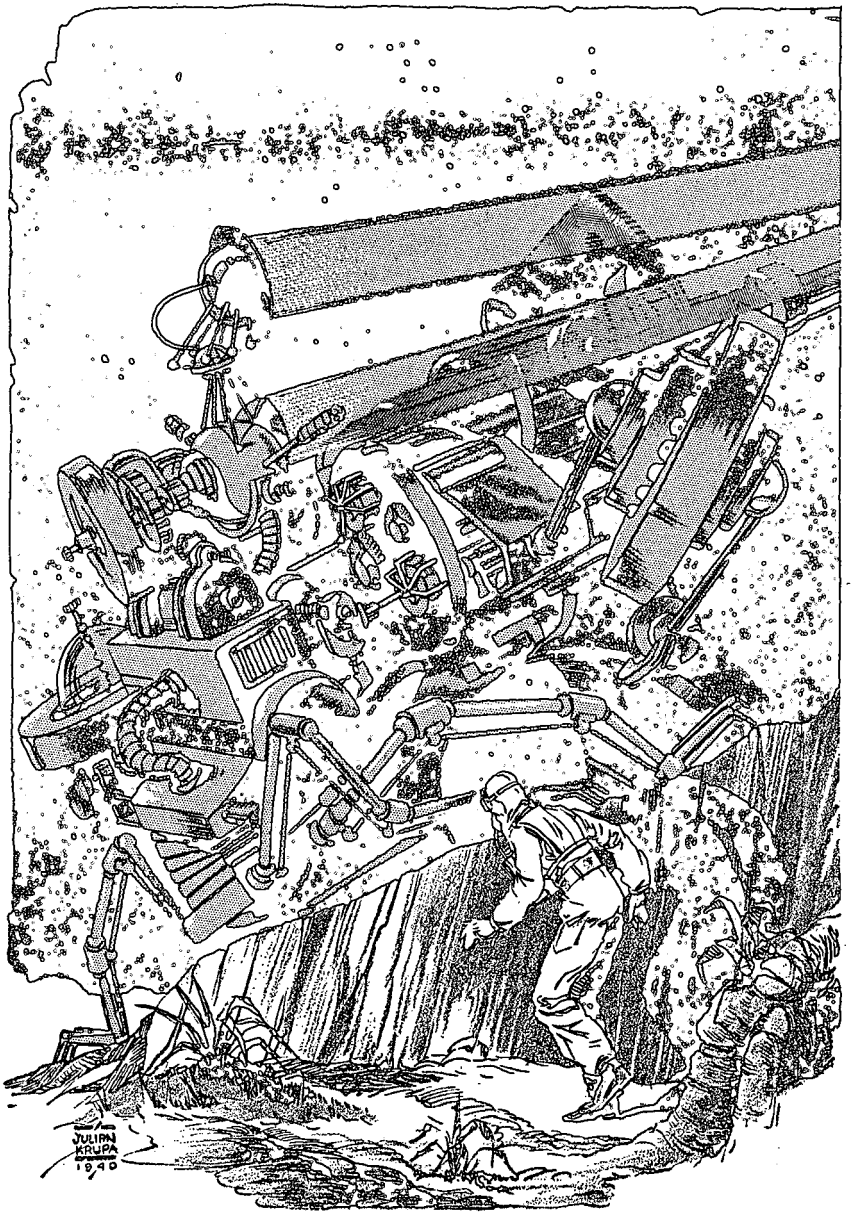

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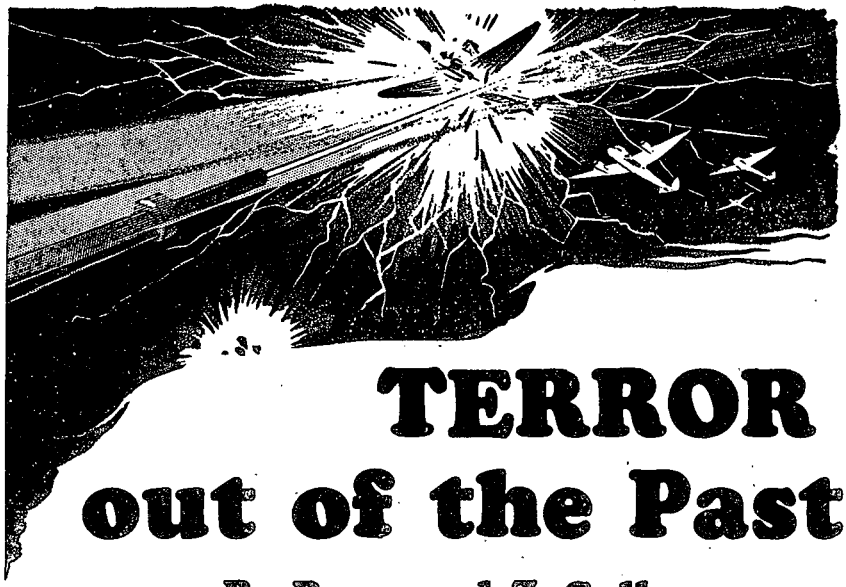

TERROR out of the Past

By Raymond Z. Gallun

Perry Wilcox descends into the earth to solve the secret of an incredibly ancient civilization

"ROD!" Perry Wilcox shouted above the sound of bracewires singing in the slipstream: "In the name of Mathuselah! Look! there!"

Doctor Roderick Murgatroyd's shrewd old eyes probed swiftly along the line of Perry's pointing arm. For a moment he couldn't get it at all—couldn't see what hundreds of airmen, flying over this place during the past three or four decades, had missed entirely. But then, as Perry circled the plane around in a steep bank, it came over the old adventurer-scientist gradually.

There was a humping configuration of those hills down there—faint in outline as an old footprint in a rainwashed garden. It couldn't have been noticed from the ground in a million years, and even from this altitude it was as vague in outline as the memory of a dream.

The hills below looked like a gigantic Indian Mound, a mile in extent, and perfectly though dimly triangular. Regularly placed along its straight sides, were humps—foggy nodules—suggesting somehow the ruins of massive turrets, lying buried beneath layer on layer of repeated glacial silt.

Rod Murgatroyd began to cuss, half to relieve his feelings and half as though to drive away the possibility that he and Perry were mistaken.

"By the nine gods!" he roared back through the propstream. "It's a fortress, Perry! You can almost see the

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battlements! But who in the name of the Cyclops could have built it? And when? And what in heck are we gonna do about it, Perry? . . ." Murgatroyd's voice was almost a whine of eagerness at the end.

Perry Wilcox was grinning broadly. "Do?" he returned, knowing that Rod had already passed the obvious answer and was planning far ahead. "What are you asking me that for? It ain't much of a riddle, is it?" He swung the plane into the wind, and began the glide toward Schroeder's hayfield.

Forty-eight hours afterwards, behind a high board fence, erected for secrecy —that is, as much secrecy as they could hope to achieve in surroundings that knew them well—the small crew they had assembled was busy. A heavy diesel motor pounded steadily, driving a rotary drill that was digging deep into the side of a low knoll.

For weeks the work went on. Five separate shafts were sunk into the ground, the first four of them reaching down to the solid stratum of fire rock, below the lowest and oldest fossil levels. From the depths of those first four shafts the drill brought up pieces of stone, some of which had angular corners, like carven blocks. And there were great lumps of rust too, that might have been reenforcing bars of steel. Thus the mystery deepened, taking on qualities of nervous unrest and expectancy.

And then, far down in the fifth shaft, the spinning diamond points of the drill snarled into a new medium. An hour later, in the summer dusk, Roderick Murgatroyd stood shifting a few ounces of muck, brought up from the excavation, back and forth between his palms. Most of it was grey volcanic stuff, but mingled with it were long shreds of metal, scored out by the drillpoints. The metal was as soft and pliable as lead, but it possessed a very considerable tensile strength. Tests had already proved that it was lead, alloyed with certain rare-earth elements, probably to increase its toughness, and to render it immune to the ravages of time.

"It's true, Perry," Murgatroyd said very quietly to the younger man beside him. "Truer than we could have quite understood before. Metal down there shows that. A carefully prepared alloy, such as only a very well developed metallurgical science could have produced. A layer, or a shell. Or maybe just a block. We don't know yet.

"Yes, we're on the right trail, Perry, even if it does look like a wild trail! Only yesterday the drill brought up fossils of an *undisturbed* stratum belonging to the Jurassic Period, the Age of Reptiles many millions of years ago! That means, Perry—" and the old Scotch-American's voice was still more vibrant and tense—"that means that this lead alloy was made and put into place before—long before—the time of the dinosaurs. In fact, if we are to judge from the stratum immediately surrounding the metal, it is contemporary with the Carboniferous Era or Coal Period. That's the point, Perry. There weren't any men on this planet at that time. And there weren't going to be any men for ages and ages. At least not Earth men. . . ."

Perry Wilcox nodded, controlling his own taut nerves. They were right at the edge of a staggering discovery, he was sure. It might break any minute, now, or any hour. The drill machinery still vibrated, boring into that mass of metal deep in the ground. The pumps, sucking seepage water out of the excavation, still throbbed. The two men's ears were tuned to the sound of the machinery. Any shift or change in the regular beat of the drill would have a story to tell. Thus they waited, as

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night began to fall, slowly but surely.

THEY hadn't heard the soft purr of an expensive automobile on the roadway beyond the fence, at the foot of the slope. But now the sounds of a brief, angry argument at the gate, some hundred yards away, drew their startled, nervous attention. With so much that was unknown and unhintable pending, this was hardly the time to receive visitors of any kind, certainly not hostile visitors with ideas of their own.

Uneasily, Wilcox and Murgatroyd turned to face a group of people hurrying toward them across the intervening area of the fenced enclosure. One was a trusted workman, left to guard the gate. But the others—there were four men and a girl—had been able to overrule the guard's refusal to admit them.

Of the four men, three were burly, massive specimens with the scars of many combats marking their coarse features. The fourth was slender and bent, maybe fifty. His head was entirely bald, his cheeks had withered lines in them, and his squinted piggish eyes held a look of secretive, hungry searching.

Murgatroyd and Wilcox had no trouble recognizing this uninvited guest, who clearly was the master mind of the intruding group. All the world knew Lyman Kerwin, whose colossal fortune had thrust dominance-seeking tentacles into most of the key industries of America. Path of Progress, Rod's and Perry's outfit, had tangled with him once. They'd taken newsreel pictures of the collapse of one of the gigantic but poorly constructed power and irrigation dams which he had built in one of the western states. Hundreds of people had been killed, and thousands had been rendered homeless by a disaster traceable to materials and workmanship far less costly than specified. Only Kerwin's money, fixing a corrupt court, had enabled him to escape the consequences of criminal misrepresentation.

Seeing Kerwin, and the inquiring speculative glances he cast about the enclosure, Doctor Murgatroyd's pointed red face suddenly darkened with fury, chagrin, and something like a nameless, nervous panic.

"Thunder of Jupiter!" he whispered hoarsely. "That polecat would have to barge in now—now, of all times! We might have known it, Perry! But you just wait till I sail into him! The dirty—"

Perry silenced the old scientist with a poke in the ribs. "You keep still," he ordered. "Just make believe you're bossing the drill crew."

THE young man advanced slowly a few steps toward the intruders. He didn't grin or scowl. He just kept his face straight, ready to meet Kerwin in whatever manner the latter might ask for by his actions or words. Perry did notice the girl in the party, though—briefly. She was walking beside Kerwin. Chestnut curls peeped from beneath an odd little hat. There was a sprinkling of freckles across her tanned, earnest face. Perry knew her slightly. She was Lyssa Arthurs, better known as Troubles, reporter for a paper in the neighboring town of Brenton. Cute, plucky kid, but she seemed a little self-conscious now. And evidently she had strange tastes in company. Perry dismissed her presence iwth a curt nod that could hardly have been called a greeting.

When he spoke, Kerwin didn't allow a lot of room for doubt as to his attitude, in spite of the veiled terms he used.

"Hello, Wilcox!" he hailed volubly in a rich voice that was in sharp contrast with his cadaverous appearance.

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"I thought I'd call, since you and the Professor are always doing such interesting things. What's up? Boring for oil or something?"

Perry kept silent, waiting for Kerwin to talk a little more.

"You might as well answer my question, Wilcox," the financier urged. "I'll find out anyway, you know."

"Maybe they're diggin' a road down to China, Chief," one of Kerwin's bodyguards offered with dry and slightly sinister humor. "Or a nice, deep hole to bury themselves in."

Before Perry could speak there was an interruption. The sound of the drill nearby, busy in the dusk, changed abruptly. There was a grating, hollow noise from far underground. Then the whine of machinery racing without resistance. Out of the pipe which ejected the muck and chipped stone and metal shreds brought up from the drilling, there came a gurgling puff, as of air trapped in a subterranean cavern, and under slightly higher pressure than that of the surface, being suddenly released from confinement.

Workmen leaped to throw out the clutch of the big diesel. Old Rod Murgatroyd began to swear excitedly, for it was clear what had happened. The drill had broken through the metal at last. It had reached a hollow space down there. A room, a chamber, perhaps, which the shell of lead alloy was meant to protect.

Perry Wilcox felt his pulses racing wildly. The presence of Kerwin could not spoil his sense of victory. In the evening air around him there was suddenly a faint, musty odor, like that of an old cellar, but with a distinctive quality all its own.

Perry saw the workmen step back from the machinery, as if they didn't know quite what to do or say. And he could tell, too, that the sudden cessation of movement, and that noisome smell, indescribably suggestive of a time that was dead for incredible eons, had had its effect on Lyman Kerwin. Kerwin's lips dangled loosely, and his eyes had lost a lot of their squint. His face was sweaty, and paler than usual.

"You asked what was up, Kerwin," Perry growled at last. "Well, so far we've tried to keep our work here dark so we could get the first investigations completed without interference. But I guess there's no use to stall. You said you'd find out anyway, and you're right —whatever good that'll do you. I think everybody'll get the story in a few days, or even hours. I suppose somebody tipped you off about what we were doing—somebody who lives around here." Perry grinned crookedly at the girl, Lyssa Arthurs, as he made this half accusation.

"But it doesn't matter," he went on. "You saw what just happened, Kerwin. We've evidently reached something with the drill. I don't know what—yet. But it's terribly old, Kerwin. And get this—there's metal down there—a perfectly balanced alloy as old as the Carboniferous fossils! Yes, it's pretty big, Kerwin! And liable to be—dangerous! Why, hell, even that cellar stench that came up from down there might actually be poisonous! It might contain microscopic spores that, in contact with human lungs, could grow and kill. Spores from the past, Kerwin. Sealed up and kept alive through the ages. Of course it's a thin possibility, but who can say? Do you still want to hang around, Kerwin?"

The latter's retreat was just a trifle too quick for good poise, and the sudden fury of his expression wasn't good form either.

"Rot, Wilcox!" he half stammered and half roared as he backed away. "You're talking rot!"

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Perry could almost feel sorry for him at that moment. Full of hypochondriac fear, inspired by nothing but the slenderest of chances, Kerwin was trying to mask his cowardice by a show of scorn.

But Perry could feel sorrier for Lyssa Arthurs. Troubles, she was called. And she looked regular, all right . . . But why was she hanging around with Kerwin?

Now Kerwin made a nervous, jerking sign to his henchmen.

"Come on, boys," he said. "We might as well leave these fools to their silly grubbing."

Even the three pug-uglies looked a bit sheepish at the hasty departure their boss led them into.

WORKMEN were grinning and chuckling as Perry turned about, and old Rod Murgatroyd's red face was alight with amusement and satisfaction.

"You sure told that ninny where to dump himself, pal," he complimented, his blue eyes seeming to twinkle even in the dusk.

Perry's answering smile was brief. He glanced toward the fence, from beyond which came the sounds of Kerwin's car speeding away along the concrete road.

"Only," Murgatroyd added, sobering, "I don't think we're through with our playmate yet, Perry. You've got him doubly sore at us now, for making him ridiculous. And he's not so scared that he won't do his damnedest to get even—if nothing else. And—glory but it would be tough to have him mixing in with something really colossal, wouldn't it? What we've got here could be good for all humanity—it could be neutral, or it could be bad. We don't know. But good or bad, depend on Kerwin to make it the latter, if he gets the chance!"

Perry shrugged ruefully. "Yeah," he said. "That means we've got to ork quick, Rod. One of us has got to go down there into the bore on a cable—find out just what we're up against in that quarter. Then there'll still be time to see if we can get digging options on the surrounding country—if it turns out to be advisable. Kerwin can't very well beat us to that, anyway. Now who'll it be that goes down there first?"

Perry Wilcox drew a nickel from his pocket. He flipped it dexterously into the air, caught it and slapped it onto the back of his other hand.

"Buffalo!" old Rod called.

Perry raised his palm to reveal a shiny Indian head. "I win," he remarked, grinning.

CHAPTER II

Mystery Below Ground

LIGHTS were snapped on in the gathering darkness. Long lengths of drill-shaft were pulled out of the boring, whose dark maw hid the unknown.

Perry put on a coverall garment of rubberized silk. Over his face he fitted an oxygen mask, and to his shoulders he attached several oxygen bottles. The air blow, after so many countless ages of stagnation, would probably be unbreathable. And though Perry had meant merely to unnerve Kerwin when he had mentioned the possibility of some kind of contamination, one could not quite be sure. It was best to have one's body encased in a sealed garment.

When he had completed his preparations, there was even a small toolkit at his hip. Attached to an elbow there was a powerful electric lamp, fitted with a long cord by means of which it could draw power from the generator here on the surface. And there was a small phone incorporated into his headgear. With the phone, like a subsea diver, he

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could maintain communication with Rod and the rest of the crew here above ground. And of course he had his motion picture camera—strapped across his chest.

With a stout steel cable fastened under his armpits, Perry clambered over the edge of the boring, and was lowered below. The trip down—nearly three hundred feet—was uneventful. The stillness in the narrow shaft, scarcely wider than his shoulders, deepened with the depth of his descent. There was only the scraping of his kit against the rough walls, and the sleepy trickle of seepage water.

He reached the punctured metal barrier at last, and passed through it. Two feet thick, the shell was. A moment later his feet touched a solid floor, wet with the water that had dribbled down through the opening.

"I'm here, Rod," Perry called into the phone. "At the bottom."

It was a moment before the older man answered, and in this interval Perry heard disquieting sounds from the phones over his ears—sounds from the surface, which seemed so infinitely far away to him now. Automobile motors racing. Voices in much larger numbers than those of the small drill crew. And to Perry Wilcox came a conviction of pending trouble.

Then Murgatroyd spoke: "We've got company up here, Perry," he said, a note of anxiety in his tone. "A lot of curious people from Brenton. Sightseers rushing to a fire, so to speak. Kerwin couldn't think of anything dirtier to do to gum up the works for us, so he spread the news around that something was up out here. Naturally I've got a whole crowd on my hands. We're trying to keep 'em outside the fence. Of course they ought to be harmless enough, really; but damn it, I wish they'd go someplace else! What do you see down there?"

Perry had his electric lamp blazing at full now. On his chest, his camera, driven by a little spring motor, was turning. And he was staring about him intently, to grasp the character of his surroundings. He began to talk—to describe what he saw and felt.

"I'M in a passage, Rod," he said. "It slants down. Its alloy walls are all bent and crumpled. It must have been the movement of the ground through the ages that did that. Gosh, Rod, but you can feel the length of eternity here! It's written in these tunnel walls, Rod. The way they're bent and rebent. I can understand now why they were made of something tough and pliable, like this lead alloy. It's twisted everywhere, but unbroken. They—whoever built this place—must have known pretty well what they were doing—whatever their purpose was. . . ."

Perry advanced slowly down the slope of the tunnel, cautiously drawing his descent cable and his telephone and electric cords after him.

He reached a room of heroic dimensions, walled with the same grey alloy as the tunnel. The Stygian gloom that obscured it parted before the intense white path of his lamp.

There were tall metal boxes, like packing cases for heavy machinery, arranged in rows on the buckled and humped pavement of the chamber—metal boxes, each with a closed and perhaps hermetically sealed door. And near the farther wall was a machine—an engine or something—that displayed a gigantic, dusty flywheel. The walls, at a head-high level, were covered with something crystalline, like glass; though where it had bent it had bent like metal—not shattering as a brittle substance would have done. Behind those crystal panes were compartments,

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housing queer, complicated devices. They looked a little like astronomical or surveying instruments, Perry thought. Were they perhaps instruments for the navigation of interplanetary or interstellar space?

Seeing charts traced on the walls above the compartments that protected this array of apparatus—charts dotted with winking, diamond-bright bits of glass, which must represent scattered suns of the void—he was half sure that his guess was right. The charts were marked with countless interlocking lines and circles, which might be the geometric equivalent of latitude and longitude, applied not to the navigation of the ocean, but to the limitless, three-dimensional reaches of the cosmos.

This much Perry Wilcox was able to note, before his eager inspection was interrupted. In the heavy stillness there was a rustling whisper, which penetrated easily the thin, rubberized fabric of his hoodlike mask. The sound swiftly built itself up into a regular, soft rhythm. Perry spoke a few warning words about this development into his phone, and described briefly the room he was in. Meanwhile he stared ahead, ready in every taut nerve and muscle to leap out of danger, yet eager to see what it was that caused the disturbance.

His lamp beam focused on the engine near the opposite wall. Its flywheel was turning, maybe after half a billion years of motionless waiting in this sealed vault. But why? How?

Perry bounced back a step, icy fingers of dread tickling his flesh. "On your marks up there, Rod," he said tensely into his phone. "I can't tell what kind of a show it is I've started; but you may have to yank me up in a hurry!"

THE engine was whizzing now, ancient dust spraying from its flywheel. For a few seconds there were no more developments, except that Perry noticed the decorative frieze around the high, shadowy ceiling. Human faces carved in the metal. They smiled down on the young man mysteriously.

Then there was a soft clank in the far distance, muffled apparently by the turn of many passages, and echoed back and forth by crumpled, vaulted ceilings and walls. The sound might have been that of a door opening, or the rattling of chains. Perry was beginning to feel very much like beating a hasty retreat; but he waited a trifle longer.

There came, then, a ponderous, soft thudding, growing nearer. It wasn't till the impression of the sound clicked into a groove in his mind, establishing itself as identical with the regular thud-thud of great, running, elastic-shod feet, entirely inhuman in their note, that he concluded that discretion was the better part of valor.

He had farther to return than he realized. And his electric and telephone cords, his hoist cable, hampered him.

"Draw in the slack of my rig," he shouted into his phone. "And for Pete's sake, if you love me, set the hoist winch going when I tell you!"

He got beneath the bore that penetrated the tunnel roof okay. But the thudding was catching up on him fast. "Up!" he yelled. "Quick!"

It seemed a century before he felt the reassuring tug of the cable under his arms. He had a chance to look back once into the Stygian darkness that concealed a reawakening and incredible ancientness. There a little red light wavered and hurtled nearer.

Perry's feet left the metal pavement. He heard a hiss, like escaping steam, just as he was drawn up into the narrow bore. Something clanked and scraped beneath him, like claws raking

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at his retreat. And the hissing continued.

He thought he could relax then, a little. But as he was pulled farther up the bore he felt heat burning through his rubberized silk coverall. It was just a harmless warmth at first, but it increased to a burning sensation about his legs. It made him dizzy and sick, and clouded his brain.

He heard Rod Murgatroyd yelling at him through the phone: "What's the matter, Perry? What's up?" And behind the voice of his friend there was the murmur of many other voices. The sightseers from Brenton. They didn't have any business being there; but if anything happened—if they got hurt—it was his and Rod's fault. Even though Kerwin, or someone under Kerwin's orders, had tipped them off for mere malice.

"Back!" Perry yelled. "Order everybody back!" When you pull me up, Rod, don't touch me without gloves! And breathe cautiously. Gas, I think. Some kind of corrosive gas. . . ."

THE rest, for a while, was like a bad dream to Wilcox. He became aware of stars overhead, and of wind. He was up in the open air once more. Nearby, Herkett, one of the drill crew, was swearing at the inquisitive onlookers, trying to send them on their way. Some were retreating. Others, held by a kind of fascination, still crowded forward against the fence, and met Herkett's blasphemous pleas with boos, or ignored them with a kind of self-conscious indifference.

Perry was sick with that intense, burning pain in his right leg. To keep his senses was a struggle. He heard noises from within the Earth—like ragged drumbeats that made the ground shake. Something unknown, crescendoing on to a preplanned purpose. Hands touched him—Rod's hands, covered with thick gloves. Car headlights flared all around in the night, mingling confusingly with the chaos of voices. Perry's rubber-silk outer garment was crumbling away from him like rotten rags. It had been eaten by a virulently active gaseous chemical, all right. Like combustion, the activity had evolved heat. He was still alive only because he was wearing an oxygen mask.

He tried to stand, clinging to Rod's shoulders; but the burnt leg, which might still put him in danger of death by an unknown chemical poison, would not bear his weight. He sank down to one knee while Rod tore the remnants of rotted rubber and cloth from his leg, and smeared an unguent on the ragged, blistered injury.

"I'll get him to a doctor," someone was saying from very close by. "You can't tell. That's apt to be very dangerous. A physician will know better what to do."

It wasn't till then that Perry saw who it was that was holding the first aid kit. Lyssa Arthurs, the girl who had been with Kerwin and his boys. But she'd come back, somehow. Looking up into the confusing medley of light and shadow, Perry saw her curly chestnut hair blowing in the wind. She looked a little bedraggled, and her lips were pursed very tight.

"Okay!" old Rod snapped, for this moment might involve the question of life and death for his friend, and there was no time to question the connections of this girl, who had been helpful. "Come on, you!" he added, grasping Perry's arm. "You're out of action for a while!"

Perry Wilcox was too dazed to think of all the reasons why he didn't want to be taken away from the scene of action now, and why he didn't want to go with anyone associated with Lyman Kerwin.

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So his stubborn protests were mostly those of a hard man of action, clinging obstinately to the habit of wanting to be where things were happening.

"Can't leave, Rod!" he grumbled like a great obstinate, drunken child. "Everybody's in danger of—God knows what. Gotta stay with you, Rod. . . ." His words were muffled by his mask.

A moment Murgatroyd hesitated, then his balled fist shot out and caught Perry on the chin with stunning force.

What he'd seen of Troubles Arthurs in the last few seconds made the old scientist like her a lot. But since she was tied up with Kerwin someway, he couldn't trust her entirely with the custody of his pal. So he said:

"Thanks, kid. Otto, here, will go along to help."

Almost as an afterthough, Rod unsnapped the motion picture camera from Perry's chest. Its record of a mystery would be safer in his keeping.

OTTO, one of the drill crew, a great, blond bear of a man, picked Perry up and followed the girl through the throng to her car. In a moment it was speeding away toward Brenton.

But it hadn't gone far before the sounds of a fresh disturbance issued from the enclosure it had recently quitted. To the thudding from beneath the Earth, was added a droning note, faint but infinitely far-reaching. It was like the drone of a solitary electric generator in a deserted powerhouse at night. And there was a puffing noise from the direction of the enclosure. Voices waxed to screams. First of plain terror; then some of them changed to yelps of agony.

The reviving Perry half rose in the back seat of the speeding car. Then Otto, with all the good intentions in the world followed Murgatroyd's original example, hit Perry on the chin, and told the frightened girl up ahead to drive faster.

Meanwhile, safe in a hotel room in Brenton, a man sat at a writing table and waited. Lyman Kerwin had just received a phone call. One couldn't tell, yet, what was happening. But Kerwin's mind was quick and cold and ruthless. And somewhere in all this he saw a lot to his advantage—if he played his cards right.

CHAPTER III

A War Against Machines

IT was many hours later before the doctors at the Brenton hospital knew that Wilcox was out of danger. The gas that had burnt him was a little like mustard gas in its action, though more virulent; and it had narcotic properties that could function through a burn. With the danger from poison past, the injury was small.

But it was still more hours before Wilcox came out of the daze that had slipped over him. The immediate cause of his awakening from heavy slumber, was the roar of a squadron of airplanes, passing over the hospital roof.

He sat up dizzily. In the distance he could hear a muted mutter and clank. Then a series of heavy explosions. He looked about, noticing only subconsciously that he was in a hospital ward. His gaze settled immediately on the nearest window. Weakly he climbed out of bed and limped and staggered toward it.

The view extended for miles to the north, across the little city, and across the hills and woods and fields beyond. Everything he could see had the look of a place in close proximity to the no-man's-land of a great war. Lorries, loaded with troops, were moving in the streets. Tanks roared. Supply trucks,

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most of them pulling guns, moved in a ragged stream.

Perry's face went haggard and drawn as he looked for the airplanes he had heard. Far up, he saw three. Huge bombers in the clear air. Clusters of black specks trailed down from them—bombs released from the racks. And in the hills beneath there were geysers of flying earth, followed by dull concussions.

Then unseen, hurtling vengeance touched each of the planes in succession. From somewhere in the sylvan terrain beneath, there were three faint pops. A second later, one of the bombers dissolved into a silvery cloud—duralumin and steel. It was the same with the other two planes. They fell apart as though all the cohesive force of the metals from which they were made was suddenly disrupted. The men aboard them hadn't a chance.

Perry Wilcox gulped painfully as his eyes searched the wooded hills, trying to orient things so that he could tell just where Murgatroyd's and his fenced enclosure had been. He couldn't see the fence. It was too far off and was hidden by the trees. But he did see a ragged line of peculiar upjutting earthworks. It appeared to follow the contour of the mounted mystery that he had first observed from the air. Shells from man-made cannon splashed against it.

Just for a moment a gleaming colossus reared its hunched bulk behind the barrier. It glistened in the late afternoon sunshine as it seemed to take a look about; then like a lizard retreating into its hole, it slid back, from view. But behind it there were sounds like the working of great forges. Columns of smoke puffed up, dyed with the red of molten metal.

His attention was attracted to something else. Beyond the partly raised window, and across the street, he could hear a radio in one of the houses there. He bent forward tautly, straining his ears to listen. The voice was unpleasantly familiar:

"The latest newsflashes give us little hope. Our attacking forces are being beaten back, or destroyed. But we have great resources. We must be brave. The enemy is a strange one. We must amass more men, conscript money for war materials. Billions of dollars. That is our hope, our one chance. We must have a strong central government. That means the absolute leadership of one man. Obedience must be the key. My whole resources are at the disposal of the nation. We will triumph! We must! The Murgatroyd-Wilcox Horror will thus be destroyed. Be strong, friends. Be strong. That is all for now. . . ."

BEFORE the brief, artfully worded speech was half delivered, Perry Wilcox knew a good deal of what was spoken between its treacherous lines. The rich, semi-hysterical voice, seemingly overflowing with holy patriotism, had been unmistakable. Lyman Kerwin. But before Perry had time quite to digest this knowledge, someone called from behind him:

"Hey, fella, you're supposed to be in bed!"

Perry swung about, startled, forgetful of his injured leg. He confronted cool dark eyes with a quiet, half smiling challenge in them. It was Lyssa Arthurs again. Perry was glad to see her for a second, then he remembered.

"Well, what do you want?" he blurted sullenly.

"I've signed up for emergency work, and I was put in charge of this ward," she responded frankly, making a plain effort to avoid a painful clash of personalities.

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But Wilcox was in no mood to take the hint. "Yeah?" he grunted. "Well, I seem to remember that it was you who brought me here to the hospital. For that, thanks! Otherwise, why don't you go hang around Kerwin some more? He's ambitious and capable! He can do things for an up and coming newspaper woman like you! Why I just heard him make the nicest, smuggest little speech you ever could imagine—over the radio. All about conscripting more money and men, and putting the country under the absolute control of one leader—himself, of course—to fight what he calls the Murgatroyd-Wilcox Horror. But I can see through him as though he was glass! He controls most of the munitions plants on the continent. The money'll go to him!

"But that's penny-pickings! He talks about absolute obedience. Sure! With himself as boss! Kerwin talks smooth. There's only one thing I can't understand about him. He's as yellow as a hyena. How he can find the nerve to talk fight now, is more than I can see!"

The girl regarded Perry coolly, after he had finished. "I'll be kinder than you've been to me, Mr. Wilcox," she said at last. "It's the privilege of all sincere science to explore the unknown. You and Mr. Murgatroyd did just that when you dug into those hills. You had no idea what would happen. But the result *is* your responsibility. As for my being with Kerwin—it's not your business, of course, but I may not have enjoyed that myself. It happens he owns most of the *Brenton Herald,* for which I work. He asked me to come along with him to visit the site of your excavations, and I couldn't very well refuse. It happens too, that I didn't tell him that you were digging there, in case you're accusing me of that. But there are plenty of sources from which he could have gotten information to arouse his curiosity. You are well known, and people are curious. But of course all this petty explanation of mine can't mean much now."

Perry bit his lip, feeling briefly sorry that he'd openly connected Lyssa Arthurs with the Kerwin outfit. But he was by no means ready to trust her either.

The rumble of shells, exploding miles off, beat into his mind. There was a mysterious hiss, followed by the screams of dying men. Perry winced. It was logical of course that soldiers should be sent to attack whatever it was out there; but he was sure that Kerwin must have some special knowledge about the enigma up his sleeve, or else he'd never have the guts to be delivering radio lectures that didn't say anything about running away.

"I don't know enough!" he groaned aloud. "I was put out of action too quick to see just what took place at the excavation. I can't judge—"

Suddenly he grasped the girl by the shoulders. "Where's Murgatroyd?" he grated. "Does anybody know?"

Troubles Arthurs stayed cool, in spite of his fury. "Why yes," she said. "He's here." She nodded toward a hospital bed against the wall.

PERRY staggered toward the inert form which lay there. Rod, his head swathed in bandages, was completely unrecognizable. His features were covered.

"Gas, same as hit me?" Wilcox asked the girl.

"No," she whispered. "Some kind of beam of concentrated heat waves. It's his eyes, mostly."

"How long was he out there?" Perry questioned. "What I mean is, how long did he stay in action before he got hurt?"

"About two hours, I think," the girl

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responded. "He helped with the first civilian wounded, managing to stay clear of the gas himself. There was an explosion afterward. And out of the hole blown in the ground the machines —they're like strange robots—began to emerge. That was at ten o'clock the night before last. Mr. Murgatroyd was brought in at eleven o'clock, so he must have been active for half an hour after the explosion."

Perry had heard enough. He bent over the bed of his friend and touched his shoulder. "Hey, Rod!" he called. "Hey, this is Perry! Wake up, you old son-of-a-gun!" Perry's vision was misted.

Murgatroyd groaned and stirred. When he spoke, however, he seemed lucid, his mind clearing after the long siege of unconsciousness, caused by his head injury. "Hello, fella," he muttered, turning his face toward the sound of Perry's voice as though trying to peer through the bandages that covered his damaged eyes.

"Rod," the young man whispered. "I want you to concentrate—try to remember. We've got a big job that's our personal concern. But it's more than that. It's a danger concerning the whole country—m a y b e the whole world. Just what kind of an enemy is out there, Rod? Those robots. What are they? Is anybody controlling them? Or do they think for themselves? Do you know anything about them, Rod? Anything at all?"

The old Scotch-American's l i p s moved, almost hidden in the swathing of cloth. "I guess it should—be all right," he said at last. "I guess it's kind of—funny. Machines—think? Some might, but these—don't. They can do things—perfectly. Like a machine that rifles a gun barrel or predicts the tides. They're made that way. But these robots are just refined machines—acting almost human, sure! They'd almost fool you.

"They see, they hear—in a way. They come toward you, aiming and firing explosive slugs, or sending out beams of concentrated heat. But we stopped a few of those robots with shells. Just adding-machine stuff inside, Perry. Cams and rods and wires, like our inventors would build, only a lot more wonderful and complicated. No soul could be in that, Perry. No real consciousness. No ambition . . .

"Professor Vince had the wrecks hauled off—copped them for examination. I guess he knows a lot now, Perry. He tried to talk me into giving him your camera, with the pictures you took down in the bore, too, Perry. But I sent the camera to the rear with one of our men . . .

"As for the robots, they may be under some kind of centralized radio control, of course. But even that can't be—real brains. It hasn't the judgment. Any little trick, like stepping out of the path of an automaton chasing you, and staying perfectly still, fools 'em. They go right on past you. And you can pull the same stunt again and again. But they're still hellish."

Old Rod paused, panting with the effort of his long explanation. Then he went on: "So that means—there's nobody at the helm, Perry. The whole business just goes on by itself. And it *is* pretty awe inspiring and wonderful at that—so damned wonderful you'd want to cheer, if it wasn't so deadly—when a bunch of men makes an attack against it. The thing to do is not to attack, anyway for a few days. We'd learn more, then. Those robots are guardians of some kind, Perry. It's a hunch of mine. . . ."

Suddenly the old man half rose in the bed, as if the expressing of his own thoughts had startled him. "That's the

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whole crazy irony of the situation, Perry!" he cried. "Men out there, dying—and on the other side—potential progress, inspiration, miracles! The key to a new era! We've got to do something—Perry—now!"

For a second Roderick Murgatroyd looked like a magnificent, blinded seer. Then he dropped back onto the bed, fainting into a coma of fatigue. Perry touched the old man's hand with a brief pressure of comradeship.

But at the same moment Wilcox was thinking fast to correlate his new information. Rod had spoken of Professor Vince. Vince, a shy, moon-faced little man, was a noted professor of physics at Kerwin University. Vince, then, was one of Lyman Kerwin's stooges. What Vince learned from examining the wrecked automatons, Kerwin would promptly find out. Perry was sure he understood the setup at last.

Kerwin knew, somehow, that what he called the Murgatroyd-Wilcox Horror was of little danger to himself, if he kept out of the battle zone! He was only using it as a means to his own ends. Power. Complete control of the nation. Free access to the inventions this marvelous archeological discovery might reveal!

It was all too clear.

INSTANTLY Perry's plan was formulated. His injury was really superficial, now that the effect of the poison was gone. Exertion would work the stiffness out of his leg. But he glanced in frustrated exasperation at the pajamas he was wearing. A second later he was tugging at the door of the closet in the corner of the ward.

"Doggone! Where's my rig?" he was grumbling, as he clawed at the piled contents of the closet—mostly clothing of the wounded that had not been damaged by corrosive gas or heat.

He found his oxygen mask and tanks at last. Quite indiscriminately he seized a shirt and a pair of trousers, and yanked them on over his pajamas. Shoes were similarly selected and donned. Then he hurried toward the door of the room.

Lyssa Arthurs barred his way here, her lips firm though smiling. Her dark eyes had a roguish glint that admired and challenged. She looked like a courageous small boy standing up for his rights, that way, Perry thought with a strange pang.

"I'm responsible for the patients in this ward," she said pertly. "Where do you think *you're* going, Mister?"

Perry shoved her unceremoniously aside. "Places," he grunted almost good-humoredly. "You said before that I had responsibilities."

He rushed down the hall. In thirty seconds he was out in the street, with the bustle of behind-the-lines activity around him. He dodged ahead of trucks and tanks on his way to the river.

Once, from a radio in a house he passed, he heard the rich, high voice of Lyman Kerwin, exhorting, commanding, praising himself in subtle terms, using fear as a means to power:

"All my resources are at the disposal of the nation to combat the Murgatroyd-Wilcox Horror. The response has been good to our appeal for money. But it must be better. Better! We are pitted against something incredible—something that possesses many unknown weapons. The women and children of America must be protected. . . ."

Perry Wilcox growled. And almost simultaneously a youth hurled a rock at him, shouting: "There he is! There's Wilcox, one of the two mugs who started all the trouble!"

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A gang was after Perry then, pelting stones; and he knew that Kerwin's propaganda had already achieved a very considerable success.

But he didn't stop to argue. He just ran on, limping a little. He reached the powerhouse dam. There he paused briefly to don his oxygen mask and tanks. Then he leaped into the swirling water, and sank into its concealing depths. He didn't try really to swim. He made only a few strokes to keep himself righted, and safely beneath the surface. The current was swift, and it flowed in the proper direction. He had air to breathe. There was nothing much to do but wait.

Dusk began to settle. Perry heard guns on the banks of the stream, and shouts and cries, as he drifted invisible through the human battle lines. Presently, looking through the goggles of his air-tight oxygen mask, he saw light around him, then darkness, then light again. It was the regular play of a great searchbeam from up there on the hills. And there were noises too, now loud and near. At least he'd come this far without being detected.

Clinging to a rock of the river bottom, he waited a little till it got darker. Then, still being careful to keep well beneath the surface of the water, he swam toward the shore.

HE came up in the reeds at the river's edge, and peered cautiously toward the low bluffs. He had to duck his head again, before he saw anything but humping, moving shapes, and part of a great, half-restored battlement; for the search beam, swinging majestically and regularly back and forth, swept blindingly toward him.

But there were regular intervals between each successive blaze of light; and these allowed him to observe. Little, gleaming robots, walking like human beings on broad, elastic-shod feet, and provided with metal arms, were rebuilding the battlemented wall with limestone quarried from the hillside. They worked with perfect efficiency, raising blocks into place, and applying a kind of mortar with spatulate-ended arms. But their movements for each operation were always identical, betraying not intellect but standardized mechanical perfection.

And it was the same with the other machines and weapons. A gun—it didn't look so very different from a familiar artillery piece, except for its complex breech-loading mechanism, fired intermittently, without any crew to operate it. Watching, Perry concluded that its sighting and firing apparatus must be stimulated by certain sounds, movements, and lights, out there where the soldiers were entrenched. For when he heard a shout from the rear, or saw a cannon flash, or troops advancing from the trenches, there was always a volley of small, screaming shells, the latter directed with a precise, cold accuracy, that must depend on the spiritless exactness of instruments. And the result was massacre.

Heat beam projectors, lensed boxes in their webwork supports, seemed to operate under the same kinds of stimuli, turning their faint, barely visible spears of heatwaves toward sudden light, noise, or movement. Searchlights swept the sky, probably drawn by motor sounds. And if they located a plane, the movement of its light-enveloped form was enough to attract the high-angling muzzles of slender guns that fired with soft pops, but reduced duralumin to powder. The aiming was always perfect.

When the search beam was turned away from him, Perry got cautiously out of the water and dashed for the nearest bush. He crouched behind it,

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as the beam swept past him like a great eye. Then higher, to another bush. And so he advanced. Once, because he stumbled, he was caught in the open; but he threw himself flat and waited, cursing his clumsiness. But the blazing glare passed him, and no blasting death followed. Perhaps camera eyes had photographed his inert form; but mechanical, adding-machine brains had not enough reasoning powers to recognize him as an interloper, as long as he did not move. Perry breathed with relief, and continued his intermittent climb at each brief moment of darkness.

Near the top, however, it didn't look so simple. He was hiding in a clump of tall weeds, face to face with those guns—and nobody knew what other deadly devices. He was stumped as to how he should try to advance further. Make a rush? There was a pretty good chance of getting past the guns that way, as far as he could tell by visual inspection; but surely there'd be something there, in the narrow gaps between the guns—something to kill him, or at least detect his presence! It made his flesh crawl; but need gave his wits a sharper edge. He had to get through, somehow!

He searched the line of fantastic, flame-spewing weapons avidly. A hundred yards away there was a small break in it, where an aerial bomb, dropped by one of the planes, had struck. The crater still smoked with the vapors of the explosive. If there was any detecting device there, any taut-stretched wire, or anything that would bring some death machine into play at his accidental touch, it would be shattered, now, and still unrepaired.

Scrambling from bush to bush during intervals of darkness, as before, he got to the break in the line, and through it safely. Thus, he looked at last over the hilltops, and down into the area enclosed by that great, mounded rectangle.

It was a queer, contrasting scene. Familiar farm buildings stood out in the weird illumination. But everywhere there were mounds of earth and deep pits. From some of the latter, red-lit smoke trailed up toward the stars. Massive things, not unlike army tanks, moved in circles, as if pacing beats, and there was the muffled clang of what could be buried factories. The old fortress had come to life once more, resurrecting itself from its bed of Carboniferous slumber. It was a camp, bristling with strange armaments and bustling with activity.

CHAPTER IV

Into the Robot's Lair

PERRY lay prone in the high grass. He was panting and tired, and he felt a little sick again. He knew that whatever chances he had of accomplishing any good here, would be diminished if he waited. There were dozens of ways of getting uselessly killed. So far he hadn't encountered any of that corrosive gas, but hisses, and distant human screams from the flats along the river, told him that it was being used. And though he had his oxygen mask, his clothing and skin could be eaten away and his blood poisoned. Two bombers burst overhead, their powdered wreckage silvery in paths of searchlights. Perry knew he might even be destroyed by the weapons of his own countrymen.

So his gaze settled feverishly on the nearest opening in the ground. It wasn't far away, and its depths were lost in darkness. But twice he saw crawling mechanical things emerge from it. It must lead, then, toward the heart of the mystery he was trying to probe.

At the next opportunity, he made a

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dash for the pit. He lost his balance in the loose soil at its edge, and tumbled to its bottom. But except for a few scratches, he was unhurt. He picked himself up and hurried down a steep passage. Except for lights far ahead, it was dark as Erebus. But he advanced as rapidly as he could, his purpose only to explore, and to take advantage of opportunity, if it came.

Once he heard the growl of machinery, as a great crawling automaton came down the passage, moving in his direction. The headlamp threw him into full view. And there was no place to hide. But remembering what Rod Murgatroyd had told him about these automatons, and making use, too, of his own experience with them, Perry flung himself against the crumpled alloy wall and froze rigid as stone, his heart thumping madly.

The robot stopped. Its mechanical eyes must have seen his movement. Perhaps the delicate maze of wheels and cams and instruments, which was all it had for a brain, had responded to the stimulus of his moving form, and was forced, by the way it was planned and built, to wait and search for other evidence of a hostile presence. But finding none, the robot whirred on. As it passed Perry, he felt the heat of its driving mechanism. Through a quartz glazed spyhole in its flank, he saw a white, blazing globe within it—perhaps a mass of material throwing off atomic energy.

Perry's lips, sweat-daubed behind his mask, curved in a haggard smile at his oddly miraculous escape. He continued on his way.

He had an odd, tense idea of being followed by something that was not quite mechanical. Behind him, in the darkness, and even above the confined din of the factories, he thought he heard, now and then, the patter and slither of footsteps.

And so he hurried on, along the main tunnel, reaching at last a faintly lighted, circular compartment.

In the center of the room a vat, a hundred and fifty feet across, was sunk into the floor. Its cone-shaped interior was full of a greenish liquid, and was covered over by an immense sealing disk of glass. There were grids, like colossal battery plates, in the liquid. Bus-bars, penetrating beneath the sealed edges of the glass disk, attached the grids to an apparatus standing at the vat's circular rim. The apparatus resembled an electrical transformer.

Just for a moment Perry was able to look. Then the light in the chamber began to fade.

There came a rattle of opening doors as the light died completely. He tried to hold perfectly still, as he heard the soft, heavy footfalls of great robot-guardians released. He should be able to fool them too, by keeping perfectly quiet.

Now, again, he heard those lighter footfalls, that had seemed to be following him. They advanced to the entrance of the chamber. Instantly there was an answering rush of elastic-shod feet. And then a woman's scream!

Perry was petrified for a moment of utter consternation. Then he rushed toward the sound of the scuffle there in the weird dark. The slithering of his own feet betrayed him. There was a clanking rush in the gloom. Cold metal claws closed firmly about his shoulders. He struggled. The oxygen mask was scraped from his face. But the gripping members held him firm at last, and he desisted in his futile efforts to escape.

"Who's there?" he growled, panting.

"It's me—Troubles," came the answer, half sobbing.

Perry Wilcox was stunned. "How

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did *you* get here?"

"Same way you did," the girl choked. "When you ran away from the hospital, I sent an orderly to follow you, and bring you back. He didn't get to you; but he saw you dive off the dam with the oxygen mask on. When he told me, I guessed right away what you were trying to do. So—I got leave, found myself a mask in the operating room, and —tagged after you."

"In the name of sense, *what for?*" Perry demanded.

"For a lot of good reasons—Mister!" she said more decisively. "I used to be an ambitious newspaper woman, for one thing—always hunting up trouble and hoping for a scoop. You can believe it's that way, if you want to. Or you can believe that I'm the little girl that used to keep clippings of all the Wilcox-Murgatroyd exploits, and that you're still my hero—if you're conceited and crazy enough. I don't care!"

It was a torrent of words that would have startled Perry Wilcox if he wasn't so amazed already, here in this dark hole of a place, with metal monsters clutching him.

"Okay—Troubles," he stammered.

The robots restraining him were motionless. Nearby there were hollow clankings. Trying to catch the significance of the sounds, Perry was sure that the cover of the great vat was being raised. Cold prickles raced over his body. What was it that would happen now?

Lyssa Arthurs was talking again, out of the dark. "Perry," she said more gently, though just as intensely as before. "Just when I started out it came over the radio that Kerwin was appointed Provisional Director of Defense. And—and there's danger that the hospital will be stormed by a mob —to get Murgatroyd."

Before he could answer, Perry felt his feet hoisted from the floor. He was swung in metal arms, then tossed free. He flew through the air. Warm fluid closed about him. It was like water, only it stung his flesh—made his nerve-ends numb.

He heard the girl give a startled, involuntary cry, as she too splashed into the strangely energized fluid in the great vat. Automatically he tried to swim toward her; but the numbness was quickly creeping over his nerves and muscles. He could hardly move.

His voice was hoarse with half paralysis when he choked: "Keep your courage, Troubles . . ."

Perry's head went beneath the fluid. His brain was spinning. He thought he heard a click of switches being turned on. The numbness increased suddenly, like a jolt of electricity. But he managed to hold his breath. He had a curious sensation of shrinking, of being pressed together.

HE emerged at last from unconsciousness, knowing at least that he was alive. He was coughing, as though his lungs had been partly full of fluid. His head ached intolerably, and his heart was laboring like a rusty engine.

He sat up on the wet surface on which he sprawled, and tried to look about. His vision was blurred at first, and he squinted to focus his eyes. He looked around a square room, one end of which was open. Its walls were like rough, black glass. Behind him was a dark opening, like a door, from which, judging from the wetness around him, he had recently been ejected, along with a considerable quantity of fluid.

He saw the girl, Lyssa Arthurs, sprawled beside him. Worriedly, Perry scrambled over to her. She was still unconscious, though breathing raggedly. Her rubber oxygen mask was

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intact, except for the metal and glass parts, which were curiously pitted and malformed. By some unknown transformation the oxygen tanks strapped to her shoulders, were similarly distorted and useless. They were full of holes, and had lost their compressed content. Perry had parted with his mask during his scuffle with the robots, and now his tanks had broken loose from his shoulders somewhere too. He noticed that even the metal buttons of his shirt were rough and out of shape.

He ripped the useless, ill-fitting mask from Troubles' face, unfastened the crooked buckles that held the oxygen flasks in place, and applied artificial respiration.

Meanwhile he searched his surroundings. What had been done to Troubles and himself, and where had they been taken? He looked again toward the open end of the compartment. Beyond was a gigantic, beautiful cavern, apparently many miles in extent. It was walled with coarse, jagged glass. Through a system of lenses in its azure roof, light was streaming down. It must be artificial, but it was just about like reddish sunlight. The floor of the cavern was like a beautiful, wild valley, crowded with strange, exotic trees and plants; and white buildings peeped through the foliage.

What had happened looked almost simple to Perry Wilcox then. He and Troubles had merely passed down through the vat, to a vast, habitable, artificially excavated cavern below. But he couldn't accept this idea, somehow. It was *too* simple. And there was an elusive strangeness, disquieting and hard to identify, about everything he saw and felt. It was more than just the oddity of the vegetation and the buildings.

After a minute, Lyssa Arthurs sighed and tried to rise. She looked about, confusedly. "Where are we?" she demanded.

"Your guess is as good as mine, Troubles," Perry returned, awedly. "But we must be at the final center of things—at the place the robots up there were meant to guard. Whatever that may be."

They rested several minutes, not saying much. Then Troubles arose shakily. "Come on. Let's explore, fella," she urged.

Perry supported her unsteady steps as they walked out of the open-ended chamber. The ground around them was covered with a kind of coarse, shaggy moss. Trees, formed like oversized bushes, reared up over them, bearing strange fruits. The light which came from above, was warm, like sunshine.

"Kind of like a heaven here, isn't it?" the girl asked.

Perry grinned, though his head still ached. "What are you trying to do, pull my leg?—talking that kind of bunk!" he growled.

"Only it's so still and deserted-looking," Lyssa went on. "There's not a path anywhere. And look! That building!"

They had passed through a grove. Near them was a long structure of white stone. But it was like a ruin. Its rows of windows, with their carved decorations, some of them human figures, were sightless and empty, except for intruding masses of coarse, vinelike plants. Once, from its appearance, the building might have been a gigantic apartment house, teeming with inhabitants. And there were others like it, near, and far off on the high slopes of the cavern. But all had that same tenantless aspect.

PERRY and Troubles were moving along a street of what might have been a village At the farther end of the street was a domed edifice of glass of

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different colors.

And at the crest of the dome, standing firmly on a stubby cylinder which was evidently meant to represent some sort of ship, was the golden figure of a man, clad in flowing robes. The face of the colossus was stern and kindly as he stared off into the distance as if somewhere there he watched for the realization of a hope. The great staff he clutched, rested on his pedestal and rose straight upward to join with the roof of the cavern, above.

There was a steep stairway leading down to the sunken grounds of the domed edifice. Lyssa, hurrying ahead on still unsteady legs, and looking up too intently at the golden image above, lost her balance and pitched forward on the steep slant. She tumbled the full length of it. Perry gave a shout of concern and leaped after her, sure that she must have at least broken some bones.

But she got up quite nimbly and promptly. "Stumble bum!" she muttered, frowning. And then in a new and different kind of tone: "Perry—that was funny, wasn't it? I'm not hurt at all!" There was wonder in her dark eyes.

He was puffing with relief, but was startled, too. "Yeah, I see!" he said. "It's stranger than the desertion, here. I landed light myself. It was as though the air was holding me back—partly. As though it has a higher resistance, or something! But that's looney!"

They walked into the temple. The atmosphere there was cool and moist. Glass pillars, spiral in form, loomed in the shadows. Lyssa and Perry looked around intently, as if searching for the answer to a riddle.

In an indented portion of the blue grass floor, there was a cluster of spherical globes, crystal clear. They were maybe three inches in diameter.

Idly, yet with an odd and very significant thought lurking in the back of her mind, Lyssa kicked at one of the globes with her rough shoe. Immediately it broke, coalescing liquidly with several of its neighbors to form a slightly flattened ovoid. It was like a huge drop of quicksilver in shape.

Lyssa was thinking deeply, but then Perry got her off the track. "Look, Troubles!" he shouted. "The air resistance really is higher here!"

She turned her eyes toward where he pointed. Light shafted into the room through the high, arching entrance. Surrounding semi-darkness brought out the phenomenon plainly. Motes were floating in the path of the light. And long, fibrous things, like lint. Only the motes were as large as grains of sand, and the crooked strings of lint were as thick as lead pencils!

"The air resistance would have to be higher, or the rate of its molecular motion and bombardment would have to be a lot swifter than usual, to support such big particles," said Perry. "But how can that be? It seems the same old familiar air!" He halted, a startled scowl crinkling his sunbleached eyebrows. "Say!" he drawled at last, mounting incredulity in his tone. "Say! . . ."

SENSING that he was at the last barrier of the riddle that had begun with his discovery of the great triangular outline in Minnesota hills, he studied the glass walls around him. In the depths of their colored substance, he could see large bubbles, and flaws of exaggerated size. Then his gaze fell on the liquid, globular things that Troubles had kicked. They looked exactly as though it was ordinary water that composed them—as though they were dewdrops—except for their huge dimensions.

"That's the funny thing we noticed,

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but couldn't quite place," Lyssa offered. "That dew. That dust in the air. The flaws in glass. Such stuff is all bigger than it should be, Perry. But what does that mean?"

Perry was thinking as fast and as hard as he could, then, trying to put together all the puzzling pieces of his recent experience. Most significant was the odd, tightening, *shrinking* sensation, he had felt, after the automatons had tossed him into the vat of liquid.

"Troubles," he said very slowly. "I —think—I've—got—it! *We've—been reduced—in—size!* We're Lilliputians, maybe an inch high, now! This cavern isn't the huge thing it seems to us. Comparatively, it's a toy cavern. The buildings are toy buildings; though they naturally seem gigantic to us, because we're so small too. But dew and dust, relying on universal physical laws of nature, remain normally—big!"

"But, Perry," she asked in the same awed tone he had used. "Is that possible—that we've been shrunken, and still remain alive afterward?"

"Why not?" he questioned in response. "Everything is practically the same—really—just s c a l e d down.* Every cell in our bodies must have been correspondingly shrunken, of course, so that there are as many cells now as in the beginning. Otherwise we wouldn't be—ourselves. If there weren't somewhere near the normal number of grey cells in our brains, for instance, we'd lose our reasoning powers.

"We were thrown into the vat. Energy worked on us, drawing substance away from each living cell—fat, protein, sugar, water—and the cell-walls shrank, and we shrank with them. Our excess body substance was perhaps absorbed by the green fluid, maybe being preserved for a reversal of the process —a return to normal size. Only judging from what happened to our metal buttons and things, the trick doesn't work out very well for inorganic substances."

Perry halted, recalling something significant. "Remember how you fell down those stairs up there, without being hurt at all, Troubles?" he questioned. "That you weren't hurt is part of the relativity of being small. Take a mouse and drop him from a high place, and his injury doesn't amount to much. Drop a man from the same height, and he gets all smashed up."*

Lyssa Arthurs seemed to muse for a moment. "Yes," she said. "I see . . . Whoever built the fortress must have built this miniature cavern before they reduced their size, since this building is constructed all in one piece, and not of blocks cemented together. And you wouldn't expect little people to do that very readily. Then they came down through the vat apparatus. But why,

* Judging from the vat in which Perry and Troubles were reduced, the apparatus attached to it, and the sensations of being in that green fluid, it would seem that the process of reduction is partly electrical. Perhaps similar to electroplating —the drawing away of substance from one electrode, and its transfer, in the form of ions, to the opposite electrode. Each cell in Perry's and Troubles' bodies, and in their clothing, could have been reduced that way. This isn't so startling when reduced to prime factors. The human body is simply chemicals. So are clothes. And life may be electrical in itself.—Ed.

* For a given shape and density of material, the smaller an object the higher the proportionate resistance it offers to the air. This is because, in relation to its bulk, a small object has a greater surface area than a large one. Hence, relatively more friction. Thus, in air, a mouse might be expected to fall slightly slower than a man.

But this is not the most important reason why small objects are not as easily damaged by proportionate forces as large objects. Take the model of an ocean liner. It seems very firm and rigid. Build a full-size ship under the same specifications —same steel, same relative thicknesses and lengths. If it was possible to pick such a ship up from either end, it would be in danger of breaking in two under its own weight!

Small objects are relatively stronger. In order to make a full-size ship as strong as its model, the strength of the materials used would have to be increased in proportion.—Ed.

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Perry? Why did they want to be small? What advantage was there in it? Who were they?"

OVERHEAD, in the arching dome, Perry Wilcox noticed a picture. An ocean washing a jagged shore. It looked just like a modern ocean. Only, in the gorges between the jagged volcanic bluffs, there were bizarre, fernlike trees, such as had existed in the Terrestrial Carboniferous Period.

"I think," he said, "these people came from another planet. That ship looks like a space ship."

"Do you really think so?"

"Yes, and it was a tough world for a raw bunch of colonists," Perry went on. "So it was probably easier for them to make a small world of their own. One they thought they could regulate and control. Only—there was something wrong with it. That's why they're extinct."

"I guess you're right, Perry," the girl offered. "They built the fortress. It was their first encampment, within which they could make their preparations. Then, when they were ready to become small, they covered it over to hide it. The automatons were sealed up, with special apparatus to make them active—if there was danger—if some snooper came around. For instance you, Perry. Our being sent down here, was part of the plan too—captives or guests. Only the little people who were supposed to receive us, have disappeared."

It was obviously true. The valley of the cavern looked deserted to its farthest, verdure-clad reaches. The buildings, peeping white through the green, were skeletally silent. There was no sound.

The desolation got on Perry Wilcox's nerves. The vast futility of the mechanical debacle going on above. A dream that had soured. A science of miracles that had followed a Will-o'-the-Wisp to a dead end. And then Perry thought of something that changed his mood.

"They must have had a way to control the robots from here, Troubles," he said. "Everything else is too perfectly arranged for it to be otherwise. They wouldn't just lock themselves down here, blind to the upper world, would they? There must be a control-room somewhere. And logically it should be in this building, since it's the most important-appearing one in the place."

CHAPTER IV

Nemesis from the Tiny

PERRY and Lyssa found what they were searching for at last, after climbing a long, spiral stairs. The chamber was round, and was above the dome of the temple, just beneath the representation of the space ship and the golden statue of that ancient leader. The disk-shaped door was fastened by a great hasp that was disengaged easily.

Wheels, meters, switches, charts. Never before had Perry Wilcox seen such a staggering array. His heart sank. Could he ever master such a complex arrangement in time to do any good—to stop the robots and that vast, senseless conflict above? He tugged at one wheel. It turned a very little, and a meter needle nearby jumped, showing that the apparatus was still effective. But there the wheel stuck. It was locked by a slight film of corrosion. Though things in this control room were marvelously preserved, considering their titanic age, they had not been protected by a time-defying vacuum.

Perry's face went sober and tired. "Even if these are the right controls," he said, "it would take me a week and

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a lot of oil and brain work to loosen 'em up and figure em out so I could turn off hell up above."

Then his gaze centered on a mirror nearby. It was part of a periscope arrangement which evidently communicated with the surface, its upper end cleared of encumbering earth by the robots.

In the mirror was visible the slope of a hill, bright in after noon sunshine. A solid array of army tanks were creeping up it laboriously. Behind them, guns blazed. But down upon those attackers was pouring a hail of death—of sharper, more violent explosions—that wiped out two and three of the tanks at a time. Beyond, the plain was being filled with a miasmic fog of death—corrosive gas. Still, the tanks came on, each with its load of brave young men. Wave on wave, to destruction.

Perry stood watching for several moments. Viewed from the distance, the tanks looked hardly bigger than they would have, had he been normal size. His position was sort of a joke. He was standing where a general from another planet should have stood while directing his guardian robot army. But he was helpless.

"Kerwin is still at it," Perry remarked at last, his voice so matter-of-fact that it was startling.

He was thinking bitterly of many things. Of the way plans were made, hopefully, till they became faith. And then the disillusion of miscarried results—of fact. Like this buried utopia. Its creators had worked for its realization. They had achieved it, but they had vanished. Like himself, and like Rod Murgatroyd. Rod, blinded, but talking with hollow magnificence, of a strange heritage. Path of Progress. The inspiration of a more ancient science to spur mankind on. Oh, it sounded good, but it was all—screwy!

Wilcox blew up at last. "With Kerwin in control, Rod's probably already dead—lynched by a mob!" he said. "And here we are, down here, a couple of helpless peewees! I suppose we could go back to normal size—back the same way we came here. There are controls there in the entrance chamber. But what good would that do? We'd still be peewees!"

But Troubles was of a somewhat different attitude. "Maybe inch-high peewees like us have advantages at that," she said significantly. "Look, fella."

She was pointing to a slender, graceful object that rested in a metal frame over their heads. It was very like an airplane, with short, stubby wings. But instead of propellers it had rocket nozzles. Wheels on its bottom, clung to a helical guide rail that spiraled upward inside a great, vertical tube that must find its way to the surface somewhere. Apparently the tube was the inside of the staff held by the golden colossus above. And the staff penetrated the cavern's roof.

"Naturally, being as advanced in science as they were, those old people would keep something to get about with, wouldn't they?" Troubles questioned, as she climbed up the ladder to the craft's cabin entrance.

OPENING the door was a difficult thing; but Perry bounded up the rungs and was helping her. He was ready to take his chances too, in spite of his talk.

The door opened under the hammering pressure of his calloused palm. There was space inside for two or three people to lie prone. The controls were not unfamiliar. There was a joystick, and a second lever which must take the place of rudder pedals.

Perry was wigging, the control. They were stiff but not immovable. With an

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eye of a practiced airman, he noted what they did to the tail and wing fins. So far, so good. He turned a small valve on the dash. There was a creaky, rhythmic sputter from behind. Evidently there was still fuel in the tanks. In response to the brief rocket thrust, the craft rolled a little way up the spiral guide rail. Then back to norm as Perry returned the throttle to its original position.

"So what?" he said with a shrug. "Nothing funny about finding this crate here. It's made of the same kind of evidently almost uncorrodable metals as the instruments here in the control room. So it should last forever. And the old-timers must have longed for the great outdoors sometimes. That's logical enough. But there isn't the sign of a weapon—nothing we could use to attack a giant. And Kerwin is a giant, now, in relation to us!"

"How about bluff?" Troubles questioned, dimples of exasperation showing at the corners of her mouth. "Come on, bonehead. Quit stalling! Haven't you got any imagination at all?"

Wilcox grinned at her, startled and admiring. Her attitude gave him a lifting sense of adventure. "Okay!" he drawled. "Funny, though—I used to think you were a friend of Kerwin's. Of course, you could be trying to pull a fast one yet, I suppose!"

"And I could knock that pug schnozzle of yours flatter than it is, for that crack!" Troubles returned. "Come on! Let's see action—if you're good enough to get any out of this thing!"

Perry opened the throttle. A little at first, then more and more. Speed was built up. It became a dizzy whirl. Around and around that spiral track, up and up . . .

LYMAN KERWIN sat in his office, topping the great Kerwin Building at Chicago. Glass surrounded him—thick, green-tinted, bullet-proof glass. Above him, beyond the metal-ribbed sky-panes of his eyrie, the star blinked. Lyman Kerwin was studying the notes of the speech he was going to deliver in five minutes.

Thoughts went racing through his fevered brain. Thoughts of satisfaction and triumph. Here he was like a god, far up above the rabble. What did it matter if a lot of them hated him, and mistrusted his motives? They were afraid of what it was out there, not so many hundreds of miles to the northwest. He'd see that they remained frightened, as long as it was necessary.

They didn't know what he knew—what the poor fool, Professor Vince, had found out—that the enemy were only machines, awesome in their powers, but incapable of organized thought. Someday, when Vince had learned more for him, and when there'd been enough fighting to give him full control of the country, those robots would doubtless provide him with a means of keeping his power in hand, even of extending it.

Lyman Kerwin arose from his chair and strode to the paneled cabinet in the corner. He entered the cabinet and snapped on the brilliant lights on either side of him. Facing him was a radio microphone and a pair of lensed, television eyes. He had only to close a switch to make himself visible and audible to the waiting world.

Above him was a mirror. Kerwin admired himself in it. He knew he wasn't handsome—in any ordinary way, at least. It would be better, of course, if he were young. But he looked like a master. He looked clever. Yes, he *was* clever! A genius! And his new, black uniform was slick, becoming the role he must play. There was a badge on the coat lapel. U. S. in black blocked letters, against a red background. And

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at the center, in a gold star that was like a small, bright halo of glory, his own initials in black—L.K. The badge was his own idea, and the jeweler had wrought skillfully.

It was almost time for the speech, now. Kerwin turned about to get his notes. He stopped in chagrin. The papers on his desk were burning merrily! How they had become ignited, he couldn't imagine, since he hadn't been smoking. It was unnerving. The first wave of fright went through his cowardly soul as he bounded forward to brush the burning papers to the floor, and stamp out the flames.

He hadn't seen the tiny, two-inch thing, like a miniature plane in shape and function, that had come down through the ventilator above. While his back was turned, it had darted toward the papers. Its atomic rocket blasts, blue and almost invisible, yet terrifically hot, had touched the litter on the desk. Now the minute intruder clung, inactive, by means of anchoring claws, to the wallward side of an urn of flowers atop a bookcase.

Kerwin shrugged his hunched, sloping shoulders. "I don't need the notes," he thought, trying to reassure himself —trying to drive the nameless, uncanny fear out of his heart.

He walked to the television cabinet and snapped the switches. It was time to broadcast.

"My friends," he began. "Today we have started the big push against the Murgatroyd-Wilcox Horror. It may be that hundreds of thousands of men must die in the battle to hold this terrible enemy in check. But this cannot be helped. I have tried to do my part. I appreciate the great honor that has been bestowed upon me in making me Director of Defense. But for efficiency, I cannot go on in this manner. There is too much bickering among people who are not sincerely fighting for the welfare of humanity. I must have the means to command, and if necessary, silence these individuals. I must have full control of all the nation's resources. In this emergency, not a moment must be wasted in friction—in lack of cooperation. I have—"

Kerwin's small eyes were beginning to shine, but he stopped abruptly.

VERY near to him, he heard a tiny voice speaking. Its tones were like the tinkling of minute flakes of glass. It was an impossible voice, and yet a vaguely familiar one. Though it seemed close—almost at his shoulder—still it seemed, too, to be shouted from a great distance:

"Interesting speech, Kerwin! Well planned! You've reached the crucial point in your scheme, huh? All right! Go on! Don't hesitate!"

But Lyman Kerwin's words had broken off. He half turned. Then he remembered his audience—millions of people observing his every move by means of television. He didn't dare show any fear or disconcertion, now! The rabble must believe in him. But a cold dew of terror was breaking out on his bald pate and skinny cheeks.

"I have—I think—p r o v e d my worth," he continued, stammering into the microphone. "I must not be hampered by—by the President of the United States, and by—Congress. I—" Kerwin's voice was becoming a thin squeak.

"What's the matter, Kerwin?" came taunting words in those thready, elfin, confident tones. "Got stage fright or something? Don't act like that! Pull yourself together! People will start laughing at you, first thing you know!"

"I—" the crooked financier gurgled, struggling to go on with his oratory from where he had left off; but nerv-

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ousness seemed to have strangled him.

And the unseen, pixy speaker went on: "Come now, Kerwin!" he was chided. "This won't do at all! You're a big man, you know! You've sent thousands of youth to their deaths already—just for your own glory. You can't let everybody know you've got a yella streak a yard wide. . . . No, stop! Don't go turning off those switches! It happens we could kill you in a split second. On the second thought, maybe it's just as well folks see what goes on here. You wouldn't want anybody to be misled, would you? There, that's better! Don't shiver so much. Don't turn. Just stay where you are. . . .

"That's probably a real good microphone you've got there, Kerwin. It'll probably pick up even my voice, so everybody can hear it. I'm not exactly just the voice of your conscience, you see. Nor am I so easily ignored. By now many men know what you're up to, Kerwin. They know about those robots —that they're only mechanical things intended for defense. They've learned this fact in the front lines. But you've been clever enough to keep them there, where they'd be killed quickly. But we know more about this so-called 'Murgatroyd-Wilcox Horror' than you or your scientists do, Kerwin. Because we've been—and so to speak still are—*on the inside!*

"There's just one thing for me to say to the world, Kerwin. There isn't time, right at this moment, for complete explanations. But I think many people will anticipate my suggestion—that the army be withdrawn to a distance of half a mile from its present entrenchments. I do not think it will be attacked there. If we are given ten days to work—Miss Lyssa Arthurs, late of the *Brenton Herald,* and myself, Perry Wilcox—I think the trouble will be cleared up."

The little voice took on a sharper edge, as it addressed itself more directly to the financier: "You can turn around now, Kerwin. I guess it's the end, huh? They've seen you, they've got your number. They've heard me talk. Maybe they're wondering what it's all about. Maybe they're scared and uncertain. But one thing's sure—you're through. You're a yellow fake, Kerwin. . . ."

SLOWLY the financier pivoted on rubbery legs. His now bulging eyes saw nothing but the great room, which was to have been the focus of his empire.

Quivering with a horror that was part nameless and partly born of the knowledge that he was an exposed enemy of society who could never escape, Kerwin backed along the wall. He reached a window, and tugged at its fastenings for air.

He gave a start as a low hiss sounded near him. Looking back, he saw a little dartlike thing, spitting blue flame, and swinging close. It had an ugly, alien look. He ducked it, screaming. With wild clawings in which no reason remained, except to escape that devilish, hissing unknown, he climbed to the window sill. There he toppled briefly, babbling:

"I didn't mean it! No! Don't! . . . ."

A moment later he pitched, with a wail of terror, toward the street far below.

This time he hadn't heard two faint tinkly voices, shouting a belated warning. Perry and Troubles hadn't meant to frighten him to this extreme.

The plane flew back, alighting before the microphone, and in the path of those television lenses. Two little doll-like beings descended from the craft. For ten minutes Perry Wilcox talked, telling what had happened; and the world saw

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and heard. Then he and his companion returned to the plane. With a hiss it flew toward the ventilator in the ceiling. And the city below, hummed in wonder.

THERE were some doubts, of course; but the big push was stopped. A week later, the army, watching from its new, rearward trenches, saw a sudden cessation of motion on the citadel they faced. Most of the gleaming Titans there, stood still in their tracks, as though frozen in the morning sunshine.

Perry Wilcox and Lyssa Arthurs were pulled, inert, from the vat of green liquid by attendant robots left active for the purpose. They had submitted to the reversal of the process of decreased size, and now they were normal again. After an hour they awoke. They passed through the exit tunnel, and out into the open air. They climbed down the silent slopes beyond the ramparts.

They reached the ragged, battered river flats, strewn with wreckage and dotted with silent metal giants. Then someone hailed them. A tank, piloted by a soldier, pulled close. Its turret opened, and a head was thrust out. Perry saw a new Windsor tie, new checkered shirt, a thin face, a bit blistered, and red hair, singed short—only, there was a bandage over the eyes.

"Rod!" Perry gasped. "I thought—"

Old Roderick Murgatroyd laughed. "I know," he chuckled. "You thought Kerwin's roustabouts lynched me. But when they stormed the hospital, I wasn't there! Fooled 'em. Sneaked off. Then some newshounds cornered me. But never mind that! See! I've got my newsreel rig!" He was clutching the small camera strapped around his neck as he continued plaintively: "I want to take some pictures, Perry. Darn, I can't wait for my eyes to get better! Show me what's good. Path of Progress has made its greatest hit. We've got to carry on, Perry. . . ."

Wilcox' face was suddenly pained. But he kept his voice brisk. "Sure we've got to carry on, Rod!" he enthused. "Hurry up and get out of that tin wagon! There's at least a hundred battle automatons standing here around us!"

"Hang the automatons," said the old scientist, jumping down lithely with the guidance of Perry's hand. "I want a picture of you, first!"

"That means Troubles too, then," Perry shot back. "I think you'll be buying wedding presents before very long!"

"Jupiter! That's swell! Now, let's see. . . . Just where are you?"

"Right here, Rod!" Lyssa said briskly, a small, unnoticeable catch in her gay tone. "Standing close together. Shoot!"

They let him take his time, fumbling eagerly but clumsily with his camera. And from his enthusiasm they drew many thoughts. He was a little like the leader of those people from interstellar space, who had built themselves a lovely, forbidden paradise in the small—a paradise that native Earth men would never colonize, though there might soon be found many uses even for the ionic science that had made it possible. Exploration of places that full-size men could never reach. A miniature secret service, perhaps.

The golden statue on the crest of the Pantheon, down there. Old Rod belonged to that same class—an idealist. Nor could Perry Wilcox scoff now, for he was one himself.

In the silence, Rod Murgatroyd's camera mechanism worked. In the background, above the scarred slope, smoke arose silently from the vent of a subterranean factory.

This was old Rod's moment of triumph. So Perry and Troubles could not tell him that his eyes were gone.

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(continued from page 53)
empires came to him and said that the trees might live unmolested. For Thorsen knew his dream was right. Like right dreams, it would be accepted by the plodding masses of humanity with monumental slowness. But it would be accepted!

He was prepared to wait. The air in the building already had a sharp artificial tang. The Refurnisher would function for years to come. And his hydroponic trays would make sufficient food.

The Council workers were getting into their trucks, leaving the Samuelsons deserted tangles of machinery on the ground. Thorsen's men climbed in among them. Their enmity had disappeared.

Moving to the very edge of the field, until he could feel a faint tingling on his naked arms, Thorsen saw Alma Ward being helped up into the high truck bed. He thought she was crying, but he couldn't be sure. Her mouth moved, though. He studied it as the trucks pulled away. And suddenly he saw that she was saying, "I'll be back," over and over and over.

The trucks were gone, and dust clouds floated on the blue sun.

Thorsen strolled through the building. The Dreaming Trees bent down their branches as he moved among them, and their colors changed in joyful patterns, dappled with the sunlight.

And he knew, with great certainty, that he would not have many years to wait. For Alma or the people. He walked on, going nowhere, but vibrantly proud of every path he trod. This was home.

The forest whispered welcome.

THE END

(continued from page 103)
When darkness fell, they left him alone in his house.

Marcusson filled the early evening hours studying the written Martian language. He had made quite a little progress with the words and could now pick out phrases and whole sentences from the long, narrow books the two Martians had given him.

It was about time, he decided, to widen his areas of research. Tomorow he would insist upon visiting the gray city across the hills.

BUT THE people of the city came to visit him. He arose the next morning and found breakfast awaiting him. But as he sat down to the table, something caught his eye through the window. He arose and went outside.

The Martians were there—hundreds of them—and more coming over the hills from the spired city.

A chill such as he had never known swept through Marcusson. He saw the bars in which he was imprisoned—the cage erected around his house—the sign in Martian lettering he interpreted into his own language and read with horror:

EARTH CREATURE—IN ITS

NATURAL HABITAT

He saw the staring eyes of the Martians and realized the full, ghastly truth of Conrad's words: *People are the same everywhere.*

He gripped the cage bars in his fists.

And screamed.

THE END

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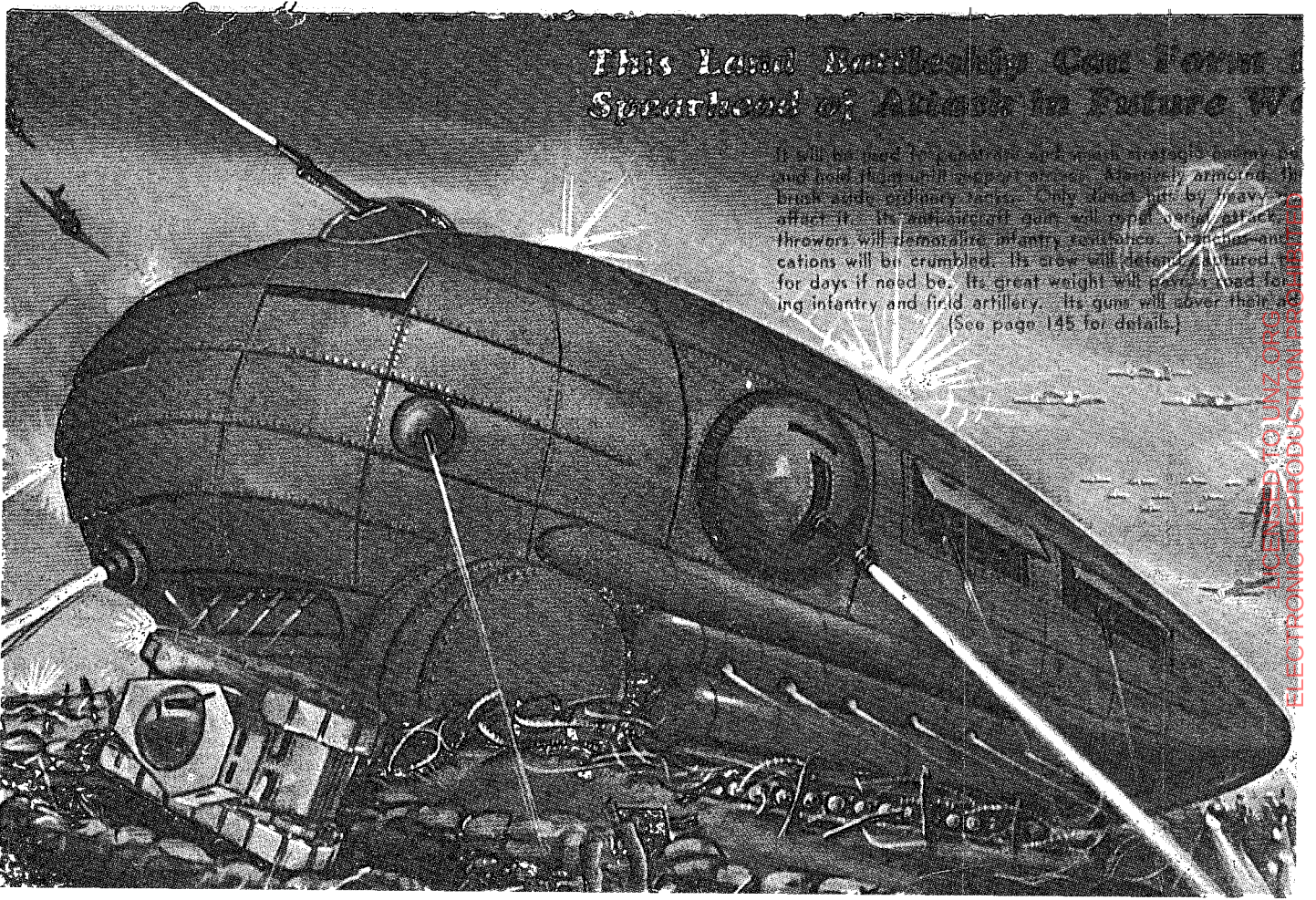
This Land Battleship Can Turn
Spearhead of Attack in Future W
It will be used to penetrate and break strategic enemy
and hold them until supporting
Massively armored
break under ordinary
Only
attack it. Its
throwers will demoralize infantry
cations will be crumbled. Its crew will
for days if need be. Its great weight will
ing infantry and field artillery. Its guns will
(See page 145 for details.)

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